

GOETHE

# GOETHE

*THE MAN AND HIS CHARACTER*

BY

JOSEPH M<sup>c</sup>CABE

AUTHOR OF

"THE EMPRESSES OF ROME," "THE IRON CARDINAL," ETC.

LONDON

EVELEIGH NASH

1912

## PREFACE

SIR J. SEELEY complained some years ago that there were too few books about Goethe in English literature. The complaint seems just when we reflect, not merely on the large generosity with which German scholars have recognised the greatness of our own national poet, but on the intensely interesting personality and career of Goethe. We know comparatively little of Shakespeare, and our most devoted research yields only a dim and elusive suggestion of his personality in many phases. His genius breaks on us almost suddenly from clouds of conjectures and legends. It is very different with Goethe. The material for writing a biography of him is exceptionally rich: it has been collected and sifted by three generations of ardent students; and the life and character which this material represents to us in their development are of unusual and unfading human interest. The art of Shakespeare is so objective, so detached, that it would live imperishably if every trace of the artist were obliterated as completely as every trace of Homer, or the Homeric poets. The great works of Goethe are suffused with personal feeling, and reflect at

## Preface

every stage the impassioned drama of his career. We do not seek to know the artist merely as a tribute to his art.

Goethe still treads the stage of the world in the character of Faust, but the true story of his life is far more attractive than the melodramatic mutilation of his great tragedy which is annually presented in the theatres of every land. We have from his own hand a minute and masterly description of the boyhood of a genius; we behold, in his narrative and his impulsive letters, the exquisitely sensitive youth awakening in a world which is a hundred years too old for him, and, while conscious of a mighty task, wavering time after time between the valleys of love and the hills of learning; we find his developed nature so many-sided that he attracts into his life nearly every person of consequence in his age, and reflects in his art every spasm of its travail for the birth of the new world; and even in his later years we see his genius linked, in rare association, with a passion that holds him to the common rank of men. The greatest literary artist since Shakespeare, and no inconspicuous figure in the scientific culture of the new world, he is, nevertheless, so profoundly human that almost every chapter in his career is a romantic love-story.

Yet so little has been written about Goethe in England since Sir J. Seeley justly complained of the poverty of our literature, that little excuse need be pleaded in extenuation of this publication. The English reader has, to-day, a choice of two

vi



## Preface

biographies: a new edition of that written half-a-century ago by G. H. Lewes, and an excellent translation of Bielschowsky's more recent and more authoritative work. Both these large works are, however, occupied, to the extent of at least a third, with the analysis of poems, plays and novels, which are now read in England only by a few. Lewes's work, moreover, unrivalled as it is and must remain in many respects, is out of date as a biography of Goethe; it is marred not merely by the many inaccuracies of detail which were unavoidable in an early study, but by many more serious errors in appreciation of character. I have assumed that there are many to whom most of Goethe's works are unknown, if not unknowable, who will welcome a full account of his wonderful career and careful study of his character, with only such brief notices of his earlier, and the chief of his later, works as may be needed to follow the broad development of his artistic genius.

It will be seen from the outset when I deal with his relation to his mother, that the work is not a mere compendium of the things that are usually said about Goethe. It offers a new interpretation of some important phases of his career. It is based on a careful reading of Goethe's letters and works, and the letters and writings of those who knew him; though I have gathered supplementary information in the whole field of German Goethe-literature, and I have found most helpful companions of research in the larger biographies of Bielschowsky and

## Preface

(especially) Heinemann. A few other works on particular stages of Goethe's career will be gratefully mentioned in their proper places. Generally, however, I have preferred to remove the literary scaffolding, so to speak, in order that the simple lines of the narrative may be followed with greater ease.

J. M.

*Christmas 1911.*

# CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I	THE BOYHOOD OF A GENIUS . . . . .	II
II	SCHOOLS OF LOVE AND LEARNING . . . . .	36
III	PREPARATION FOR "FAUST" . . . . .	54
IV	FRIEDERIKE BRION . . . . .	69
V	CHARLOTTE BUFF . . . . .	88
VI	THE TRIUMPH OF YOUTH . . . . .	108
VII	LILI SCHÖNEMANN . . . . .	129
VIII	THE MERRY MONTHS AT WEIMAR . . . . .	149
IX	THE SUNSET OF YOUTH . . . . .	167
X	THE ITALIAN JOURNEY . . . . .	193
XI	THE NEW GOETHE . . . . .	214
XII	GOETHE AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION . . . . .	235
XIII	IN THE WORLD OF SCIENCE . . . . .	255
XIV	GOETHE AND SCHILLER . . . . .	276
XV	THE SHADOW OF NAPOLEON . . . . .	301
XVI	THE LAST FIRES OF LOVE . . . . .	326
XVII	THE LAST DECADE . . . . .	349

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

GOETHE IN 1779 . . . . .	<i>To face page</i> <i>Frontispiece</i>
<i>(From the painting by G. O. May)</i>	
GOETHE'S FATHER AND MOTHER . . . . .	18
<i>(From medallions by J. P. Melchior)</i>	
THE GOETHEHAUS AT FRANKFORT . . . . .	26
KÄTCHEN SCHÖNKOPF . . . . .	46
CHARLOTTE BUFF . . . . .	96
LILI SCHÖNEMANN . . . . .	130
GOETHE IN 1787 . . . . .	202
<i>(From the painting by Tischbein)</i>	
CHRISTIANE VULPIUS . . . . .	220
<i>(From a drawing by F. Bury)</i>	
GOETHE IN 1822 . . . . .	266
<i>(From the painting by George Dawe, R.A.)</i>	
WILHELMINE HERZLIEB . . . . .	310
BETTINA BRENTANO . . . . .	320
MARIANNE VON WILLEMER . . . . .	332
ULRIKE VON LEVETZOW . . . . .	346

## CHAPTER I

### THE BOYHOOD OF A GENIUS

JOHANN WOLFGANG GOETHE was born on August 28th, of the year 1749, in the town of Frankfort-on-the-Main. The clocks were telling the hour of noon to the drowsy burghers of that old-world city when there came among them the man who was destined to cry the hour to them and to Germany with a louder tongue than one made of iron. It seemed to the few who were interested in his coming that he had just peeped through the doors of life, and was about to return to the spirit-world. The nurse was unskilful, and he almost perished on the threshold. But an aged grandmother, who watched by the bed of the young mother, persuaded him to remain, and neighbours who lived near the large gloomy house in the Hirschgraben presently learned that Councillor Goethe, the severe, studious son-in-law of their "mayor," and his eighteen-year-old wife had a son and heir.

"It seems to be the chief task of the biographer," Goethe says, "to depict the man in his surroundings, to show how far they restrain and how far they

## Goethe

impel him; how he forms out of his experience a certain view of the world and of men, and how, as artist, poet or writer, he reflects this view in his work."

In this masterly direction to biographers, it will be noticed, Goethe does not recommend the study of ancestry, which has become so fashionable. However, we are now so convinced that the virtues or vices of the child may be visited upon his parents, even to the third or fourth generation, that biographers have penetrated deep into the past in search of them. Little pieces are borrowed from this or that progenitor, and fitted into the mosaic of his portrait. From his mother we derive his genial love of life and mirth, his shrinking from ugliness, his fascination of person, even his art of storytelling; though it is not unlikely that Frau Goethe shared these qualities with many other mothers in Frankfort. In his father we find an intellectual orderliness which reappears in the son; though not until life has read him a very severe lesson in discipline. Earlier generations make their modest contributions to his character and cast of mind. But as these discoveries leave wholly unexplained the most distinctive thing in Goethe, his genius, which we do not find dawning in any earlier generation or leaving an afterglow in any later, we will not linger long among his ancestors.

The genealogical tree which he gives in his autobiography begins with his paternal grandmother, a refined and comfortable widow, and his mother's parents, the chief citizen of Frankfort and his wife.

## The Boyhood of a Genius

It appears that the paternal grandfather, whom Goethe had never seen, was an enterprising tailor who had come from the country to Frankfort, and had left the sartorial table to marry the widowed mistress of the "Weidenhof," one of the chief hostels of the town. When we follow this fortunate tailor back into the provinces, we find that he was the son of the village blacksmith at Artern, on the borders of Thuringia; and recent research has discovered an earlier generation in an equally humble home at Berka, near Sonderhausen.

On the mother's side there was comparative distinction. Johann Kaspar Goethe, the poet's father, had married Katharina Elizabeth Textor, a daughter of the Schultheiss (or mayor and chief magistrate) of Frankfort; and the Textors were, in a word, a family of substantial bourgeois officials and jurists, adorned with a modest taste for culture and music, such as culture and music then were in Germany. So prosy a genealogy did not suit Goethe's boyish spirit. He very carefully examined the family portraits, in his early teens, to discover whether his father might not be the natural son of a nobleman, and was acutely disappointed. Genius is not made, even by its parents.

His father would have been astonished to learn that he had contributed any trait to the character of his wayward son. Had he lived to read the little poem in which Wolf describes how he inherited from his father his "serious conduct of life," he would have said that it was the chief thing he failed to transmit. When it does appear, late in Goethe's

## Goethe

life, we may find another reason for it. Lewes has no difficulty in tracing the son's inheritance from the father because he holds that the "cardinal characteristic" of Goethe is the subjection of the emotions to the intellect. We shall see.

Exceptionally sober and methodical, with cold command of his faint emotions and small ideas, Johann Kaspar Goethe watched the development of his son's genius in later years with a feeling akin to that of the hen that has hatched a duckling. The figure is not new, but it is too true to be avoided. He would have made an excellent father for a great lawyer, and that was his sole ambition. He had himself studied law, travelled in Italy, and returned to Frankfort larger than most of its citizens. Here he had proposed to undertake some small legal office in the public service, without salary, if the authorities would dispense with the customary ballot. They refused; and he determined to place himself in such a position that, if he ever relented toward them, he would be unable to hold office. He obtained (for money, no doubt) the rank of Imperial Councillor, and, in his thirty-ninth year, married the seventeen-year-old daughter of the Schultheiss. On both grounds he was, for the rest of his life, precluded from taking office. As his mother had sold her hostel in 1731, and retired with her fortune of a hundred thousand guldens to the large house in the Hirschgraben, which she had bought, he had an idle life. Instead, however, of disposing him to that genial dissipation which might be expected in the son of a hostel-keeper, this idleness led



## The Boyhood of a Genius

Councillor Goethe to spend his talent in an austere control of his family. He surrounded himself with sober, well-bound books, made collections of bronzes and ivories, drilled a little Italian and music into the head of his uneducated wife (though, apparently, he never taught her to spell German), and, when children came, he drew up a formidable scheme of study and helped to realise it. Hence he is usually a grim dark figure, a domestic Rhadamanthus, in pictures of Goethe's boyhood. The poet recognised in later years that this severity was partly prompted by affection, and he usually speaks of his father with respect.

Against this dour figure the biographers place, in radiant contrast, the person of Goethe's mother. She was genial, warm, laughter-loving, ever anxious to keep her face to the sun and her back to the shade, tactful, and of good judgment. She was twenty years nearer to childhood than her husband; she relied on sugar-plums, while he favoured the rod. In later years princes and scholars esteemed her. In the poem to which I have referred Goethe says that he inherited from her his "happy temperament and love of story-telling." How far the art of story-telling is inherited, we have not determined; how far Frau Goethe differed from other mothers in that art and in brightness of character, we have no means of ascertaining; but what we do know seems to cast very much doubt on the usual representation of Goethe's relation to his mother, and the subject must be noticed at once.

## Goethe

The personal qualities of Frau Goethe are not in dispute. It is hardly worth while raising the question whether, but for the genius of her son, even Frankfort would ever have distinguished her from hundreds of other plump and cheerful housewives who told fairy tales to their children, but it is necessary to point out from the start that she had little or no influence on her son, and he had little or no affection for her during the greater part of his life. All the statements that connect her intimately with him in early life are statements made by her, and reported by a notoriously unreliable admirer (Bettina), in the time of his greatness, when reminiscences would inevitably be warmed by his position. The truth is that Goethe left home "not caring whether he would ever see it again," as he says. He had discarded his mother's creed when he was seven years old, and he was passionately attached to his sister Cornelia, who, as some of the most laudatory writers on Frau Goethe (such as Heinemann) admit, had no affection for her mother. After leaving home he wrote no letters to his mother before his twenty-eighth year, and the letters he afterwards wrote are for many years singularly devoid of the warm and tender expressions which we find so abundantly in his letters to others. During his first absence at school she complained of this, and he sent an excusatory poem; but as he continued to avoid writing to her, I cannot see in this more than a formal expression of respect. Then, in his years of adolescence, when passion and perplexity led him into crisis after crisis, he

## The Boyhood of a Genius

exposed his quivering soul to many women, but never to his mother. Even after the death of his sister and father, when the old lady dwelt alone in the gloomy house, his failure to visit her more than once in many years is, says his most ardent biographer, Bielschowsky, "the darkest stain on his career." In his autobiography he rarely mentions her, never with feeling.

A recent discovery seems very strongly to confirm this view of Goethe's relation to his mother. An old manuscript was discovered in 1910 to be an early version of his famous novel, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. The first chapters of it, which were written in 1777 and 1778, give a very thinly disguised description of his own home and boyhood. The novel, as we have it, was recognised by Frau Goethe to contain a description of the home, and it is regarded by all as more or less autobiographical, but the early version was much closer to the facts.<sup>1</sup> We have the tender and beloved grandmother, who presents the boy with a toy theatre at Christmas, the severe father, the sister companion, the prim friend who marries the sister, and so on. And in the midst of these familiar figures he draws the following picture of Wilhelm's mother :

"It pains me to have to say, but it is true that this woman, who had had five children—two sons

<sup>1</sup> See *Wilhelm Meister's Theatralische Sendung*, a series of extracts from the manuscript edited by Dr. Billeter, 1910. For the conventional account of Goethe's mother see Heinemann's *Goethe's Mutter* (1909) and a spirited but not very accurate work by Margaret Reeks (*The Mother of Goethe*, 1911).

## Goethe

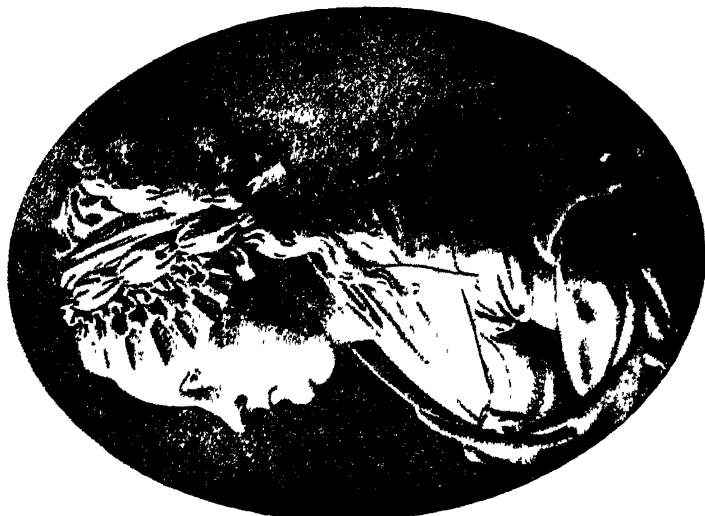
and three daughters—by her husband, Wilhelm being the eldest [Goethe was the eldest of five children], had, even in mature years, a passion for an insipid man, which was known to her husband, and so carelessness, bitterness, and quarrels were brought into the home; and that, had the husband not been a true and upright burgher, and his mother not been a well-disposed and tolerant woman, the family might have been disgraced by a shameful divorce. The poor children were the worst sufferers. In other cases, where the father is not amiable, the helpless creatures fly to their mother; in this case they found a worse evil on the other side, as the mother, in her discontent, was generally in a bad mood. . . . Hence Wilhelm had an aversion for his mother, and was in an evil plight, as his father also was a hard man.”

This is romance, of course; let me not be misunderstood. But it is impossible that such a portrait could have been inserted, even as the wildest fiction, among the correct portraits of the other members of the family, if Goethe had had any regard for his mother at that time. Somehow the bright-natured young mother entirely failed to win the affection of her children, and was not to them the light of the home. We shall see that when *Wilhelm Meister*, as we have it, reached her, she burst into exclamations of pride and gratitude over the description of the early home. And this discarded manuscript then lay in her son's desk! I do not, like Bielschowsky, see “a dark stain” on Goethe's career, but conclude that the con-

18

GOETHE'S FATHER AND MOTHER

From Reliefs by J. P. Melchior



## The Boyhood of a Genius

ventional account of his mother is false, and has no documentary basis.

Much of Goethe's boyhood and youth is better understood when we accept this view. He quickly became wilful, independent, and self-conscious. One of his earliest recollections was that, at pottery fair, when plates and jugs abounded, he flung a large number of them on the street. In the old house, before it was rebuilt, a lattice-work cage projected into the street over the service-door. Wolf was signalling in it to the boys in the corresponding cage across the street, when he flung the first piece of pottery. Their applause encouraged him, and he had a heap of broken crockery in the street before he was discovered. He was extraordinarily sensitive to ugliness, and in his third year he one day fell into a violent passion—a not unusual occurrence—because there was an ugly child in the room. It did not prevent him from being deeply attached until death to his sister Cornelia, born a year after him, who was not at all pretty. On the other hand, he loved flowers and the aspect of the rich meadows and vine-clad hills beyond the town. There was no garden to the house, but from the window of the upper room, in which he studied in summer, he could look out upon the gardens of neighbours and the green valley of the Main, and the soft blue hills beyond the crest of the city wall. Then there was a vineyard belonging to his father near the gate; and there was grandfather Textor's fine garden, where the amiable potentate, in loose dressing-gown and

## Goethe

large velvet cap, always welcomed Wolf and his sister.

For his fifth Christmas grandmother Goethe bought a princely and fateful gift, a toy theatre or puppet show. How little did the old lady dream that she was opening the true avenue of greatness to the boy, and that a hundred and fifty years afterwards men and women from all parts of the world would gaze with tenderness on that first instrument of Goethe's dramatic education! He has, no doubt, romantically enlarged his recollection in the opening pages of *Wilhelm Meister*, but we know that the picture is broadly true. They sat in the evening, in a darkened room, trying to pierce the mystery of the closed door. The door was opened, and a miniature theatre filled the opening, and the boy, feverishly delighted, saw King Saul, in black velvet tunic and gilded crown, Jonathan, in yellow and red robe, David and Samuel and Goliath play the Biblical tragedy. Some time afterwards he persuaded his mother to give him control, and made his first efforts at stage-managing. He composed or adapted new plays, then trained a troupe of his comrades and clothed them in shining armour. The first of his surviving plays was written in his early teens, though re-written a few years later. He had his first dim boyish vision of the kingdom of art, and, turn as he might to love or to science, he would never rest until he reigned in it.

The grandmother died shortly after the splendid Christmas of 1754. "She lingers in my memory like a spirit," he said long afterwards, recalling her

## The Boyhood of a Genius

frail and sweet white-clad figure. The house now belonged to his father, who desired to rebuild it. It is characteristic of him that, when he found that he would incur certain municipal restrictions if he "rebuilt" it, he decided to "repair" it, storey by storey, from foundation to roof, and live in it during the alterations, which lasted two years. The children enjoyed the confusion of lessons and the coming of new interests into their dull life, but the rain at last reached their beds, and they were sent to live with friends.

The change compelled Wolf to attend a public school for the first and only time in his boyhood. It is in keeping with the character which we recognise in him in those early years, that he disliked it because the boys were rough. The schools of Frankfort were poor little shops for retailing elementary letters, and even the gymnasium of Dr. Albrecht did not meet Councillor Goethe's high standard, so that the lessons were given at home. The curriculum embraced, up to Goethe's fifteenth year, Latin, Greek, Italian, French, English, history, geography, natural science, mathematics, drawing, and music. Goethe could write very fair Latin compositions in his eighth year. We have some of his exercises of that year, and these imaginary dialogues are even more remarkable for their humour, inventiveness, and elasticity than for their Latin.

But there is a quainter proof that this advanced learning was stimulating rather than cramping his mind. As he sat in the family room, with large



## Goethe

apprehensive eyes in his long pale face, and most acute ears, he gathered that there were differences of opinion about the simple creed he had learned from his mother. The appalling earthquake at Lisbon in 1755 had led to discussion, and Wolf reflected philosophically, if not sceptically, on it. He decided to raise his own altar to God and practise a cult of his own. On a handsome lacquered music-stand, with four-sided top (for quartettes), he arranged a number of minerals and dead things from his father's collection to represent nature; for symbol of worship he placed a fumigating taper, in a saucer, at the top. At sunrise the little priest stood reverently by the altar, and, as the first rays entered the room, he concentrated them on the taper with a burning glass, and set it alight. But he seriously burned the lacquer of the altar on the following morning, and the cult was abandoned. We gather from the autobiography that he was then only in his sixth or seventh year. He had become a dramatist in his sixth year; in the same or the following year he framed the creed of his life—a simple reverence for God-Nature, without dogmas or priests.

Although his lessons were given in the house, he was not solitary. Professional teachers came to give some of the lessons, and the children of neighbours were invited. In time a score of boys and girls studied together. But Wolf found most of them rough, and shrank from them. One day a few of the boys cut twigs from a broom, and beat his bare calves. As his father had strictly forbidden

## The Boyhood of a Genius

disturbance during school hours, he bore it stoically until the hour struck, and then he fell on the boys with terrific rage. After that the classes were reduced.

Other influences, besides the formal lessons, were stimulating his mind. During the long winter evenings the father would bring some grave improving work from his handsome library, and, let the family yawn as they might, read it aloud to them. He persisted in reading to the end, even when he had chosen a seven-volume work like Bower's *History of the Popes*. At other times the mother had her way, and the most thrilling fairy tales were spun. She described in later years the tense pale face and flashing black eyes<sup>1</sup> and hot interjections of the boy, and told how, by a kindly trick, she learned from the grandmother how Wolf thought the tale ought to end, and delighted him by bringing it to that end. Then there was a translation of *Robinson Crusoe*, and there were stirring stories to be had for a few coppers in the town.

His father's friends, also, liked to instruct the precocious boy. One of them, Councillor Schneider, set great value on the new poem (the "Messias") of the poet Klopstock. Councillor Goethe frowned on it; blank verse, he said, was not poetry. So Councillor Schneider ceased to dispute with him—in order not to lose a good dinner on Sundays,

<sup>1</sup> Goethe's eyes were really dark brown, but the pupils were so large and deep and brilliant that they seemed black to most people. His painters saw them otherwise, and his mother calls them brown on one occasion. The narrator of the story, it should be added, is a lady of more vividness than truthfulness.

## Goethe

Goethe says—but gave it secretly to the wife, who lent it to the children. They learned its fiery lines by heart. The boy loved thunder and lightning, and would generally begin a play with the murders in the fifth act. One Saturday evening in winter the father had brought the barber to the house, to prepare him for the Sabbath. Wolf and Cornelia sat behind the stove, reciting one of the most spirited passages in careful whispers. But when it came to Adramalech (Cornelia) laying violent hands on Satan (Wolf), she lost control, and shrieked out the defiant words. The startled barber spilled the contents of his bowl into the father's lap, and Klopstock was discovered and banished.

Cornelia and her brother drew closer to each other under the shadow of the austere father. Three other children had followed them into the world, but had soon been borne out again to the "home of peace" beyond the walls, and the survivors clung to each other. Together they strolled on the ramparts which encased the town and its spirit, and looked out toward the distant hills, beyond which the world lay; or wandered on the quays, when brave ships sailed up the river from far lands, and watched the daily coach from Nuremberg drop its passengers at the hotel. As grandchildren of the Schultheiss they were favoured, and they explored many a dark nook and vault of the old buildings, and heard much of the ancient privileges and historical glories of Frankfort. Twice a year they had the grand agitation of the fair, when the whole countryside flocked in, and they wandered

## The Boyhood of a Genius

among the enchanting booths, and saw the dentist and the quack and the marvellous freaks of nature.

The observant boy began early to gather the kind of wisdom which he would one day put in the mouth of Mephistopheles. He was led to visit a music-master, and the man made piano lessons so marvelously bright with little pranks and jokes that he and Cornelia at once became pupils. But the lessons were as dull as those of any other teacher, and it was not until a strange boy, a possible pupil, happened to be present that the fascinating manner reappeared, and Goethe bitterly discovered the trick. On another day he went with some adults to visit a neighbour who took great pride in his garden. They had a glimpse of a table laid with choice wines and fruit in an arbour. In the company, however, was a rival flower-grower, who touched a carnation, and, when he was rebuked, touched it again, to make his honesty quite plain. They separated the respectable burghers with some difficulty, and had to depart without opening a bottle. Such things, and the darker vaults which at times opened beneath the smiling homes of neighbours, the boy stored in his memory. In the court, where his grandfather presided, he was a frequent and attentive listener.

So he grew in knowledge, in boyish vanity, in quickness of temper, and in independence of spirit. He was preparing for his work. Frankfort had over 30,000 citizens, but its massive walls, which seemed to squeeze it until its narrow streets were

## Goethe

crumpled and disjointed, were an obvious symbol of the traditions that confined its life. It was swathed in medieval forms; its clocks had stopped at the sixteenth century. Germany was, in fact, still exhausted by the Thirty Years' War, and lay like a vast placid agricultural estate, with little industry and commerce, and still less art and letters, even in its small iron-bound towns. It hardly bore one great man in a generation. Somewhere to the north, an appalling journey for a coach, was the growing bustling city of Frederick of Prussia, and far below the western and southern horizon were France and Italy; but these were vague names to most people at Frankfort. They lived and bred and died, under the old burgher regulations, and never dreamed but that it was the eternal order of things. The wiser of them knew that the one deep thinker Germany had produced in a century, Leibnitz, regarded this as the best of all possible worlds.

Upon this drowsy optimism the storm of a new age was about to break. It was, properly speaking, the last hour of the Middle Ages; and the boy who dwelt curiously on the antiquities and peeped into the iniquities of Frankfort was to be one of the heralds of modern times. The first important event to quicken his growth was the outbreak, in 1756, of the Seven Years' War. He gathered at the dinner-table that Frederick had pitted his little army against Russia, France and Austria, and he echoed his father's applause. But Frankfort, though nominally a "free city," was under the Emperor, and was the chosen seat of imperial crownings. In



THE GOETHEHAUS IN FRANKFORT

## The Boyhood of a Genius

fact, grandfather Textor had helped to carry the canopy over Francis I, and had received a heavy gold chain from Maria Theresa, so that he was indignant at such traitorous sentiments. The peace of the family was shattered, and a stream of bitter waters ran between the houses. The happy gathering round grandfather's table on Sundays, which Wolf had enjoyed from his first years, had to be abandoned. But worse trouble was to come.

On the second of January, 1759, the trumpet of the watchman at the gate announced that troops were coming along the road. Free and neutral Frankfort admitted no troops; but the blasts of the trumpet became louder and more frequent, and before long seven thousand French soldiers poured through the gate, swept aside the feeble guard, and quartered themselves on the citizens. Their commander, Count Thoranc (not Thorane, as Goethe spells it), selected the fine new house in the Hirschgraben for his residence, and the gloom of Councillor Goethe deepened. To the boy the change was welcome. Lessons suffered, and a new page in the book of life was turned. Thoranc was a tall, thin, grave officer, with pock-marked face and fiery eyes, of faultless manners and dignity. In spite of his father's frowns Wolf found the way to his rooms, and was encouraged by dainties from the table. As the war dragged, and the French remained in Frankfort, Thoranc engaged the best artists of the district to paint pictures for him. Wolf's upper room was turned into a studio, and the

## Goethe

boy loved to hover round the artists and ask them about their work.

Then Thoranc brought a company of French actors to the town. Textor gave the boy a free pass to the improvised theatre, and a new world opened to him. Among the actresses was a Mme. de Rosne, who had a son about Goethe's age and a daughter a few years older. Wolf and de Rosne (he calls him Derones) became close friends, and the boy was admitted to the mysterious recesses behind the scenes and to the common dressing-rooms. As his French improved rapidly, his father did not interfere. After witnessing Corneille and Molière for some months, Wolf wrote a play, and asked de Rosne's influence to get it accepted. They were both about ten years old. But de Rosne discoursed so learnedly on its departures from the rules of French drama that it was abandoned. Another day de Rosne conceived that he had been insulted, and called out his friend. Goethe seems to have put on his best clothes for the solemn ceremony; he describes himself going to the field in green coat with gold buttons, gold-cloth vest, black serge breeches and fine cotton stockings, with large silver buckles on his shoes, his hair curled and powdered, his hat under his arm, and a sword dangling at his side. After a few passes the point of de Rosne's sword was caught in the tassel of Goethe's sword, and honour was satisfied. They retired to drink a glass of almond milk together. Goethe made love to the boy's sister, who ignored him, and he was thrown back upon the less piquant charms of

28



## The Boyhood of a Genius

Charitas Meixner and the other girl-friends of Cornelia.

The home was now darker than ever, and all the tact of Frau Goethe was needed to maintain comparative peace. On Good Friday, 1759, a battle was fought near the town. The father went out to the field to greet the victorious Prussians, and had to return in deep dejection. Unhappily, Thoranc, who had received the prudent congratulations of the mother and promised a feast to the children, met him on the stairs, and politely invited his compliments. The enraged Councillor told him that he had hoped to see the French "driven to the devil." Thoranc, in great anger, ordered his arrest, and his wife had much work to save him. This trying situation lasted until the summer of 1761, when the father persuaded the authorities to lodge the count elsewhere, and at once let half his house to a friendly lawyer, lest other French officers should invade it. But the French left Frankfort soon afterwards, and life returned to its even flow. Wolf Goethe, however, was a good three years older for the experience.

English was now added to his French and Italian: Hebrew was added to Latin and Greek. It is clear that he did not really master Greek until a much later year, and a reference long afterwards to his "smattering of Hebrew"—a correct description, apparently—warns us not to take too seriously the lessons he had in that tongue from Dr. Albrecht. The lessons were chiefly useful in inducing him to make a closer study of the Old Testament. He

## Goethe

joined the critical school in his early teens; but he kept throughout life a deep respect for the Bible, and strongly disliked Voltaire's treatment of it. It is, perhaps, a little quaint to find him afterwards interrupting the long narrative of his impulsive youth to say, very seriously: "To it [the Bible] almost alone do I owe my moral education." Wandering in the Jewish quarter at Frankfort, he noticed that the language used was not Hebrew, and so Yiddish was added to his accomplishments. It is clear that he had a remarkable command of languages for so young a boy. Sometime in his early teens he invented a correspondence between seven brothers and sisters who were supposed to be scattered over Europe, so that the letters were written in German, French, English, Latin, Greek, Italian and Yiddish. He was then in his thirteenth or fourteenth year.

In 1763 there occurred an episode which we may regard as the close of his boyhood and the opening of his long career of romance. If his own words in *Werther* be as true as they are beautiful, this early dawn of a faint blush of passion must greatly have quickened his rapid growth: "What is the world to our hearts without love? It is like a magic lantern without light. No sooner dost thou put in the lamp but the brightly coloured figures appear upon the white wall." The first glimmer of the light that would later blaze so furiously in the lantern of his mind was now lit in him.

Among his friends was a youth who had relations with a social world much below that to which his

## The Boyhood of a Genius

father belonged. Goethe, who peeped into all worlds, was led to associate with a number of these youths of the desk or the counter. They questioned the genuineness of the poems which he had already begun to write. He would prove it. For theme they suggested a poetic love-letter of a maid to a diffident lover. He learned afterwards that they had sent this poem to a nervous youth, who sighed for a maid above him, and they pressed Goethe to carry the matter further. He joined them at the inn at which they were accustomed to meet, and sat with some discomfort at the wine-stained table among the boisterous youths, until, at a call for more wine, a girl of "astonishing beauty" entered the room. As was to happen so often in his life, the image of the beautiful girl, framed in such sober surroundings, at once fired his passion. He did not speak to the apparition, but he made a rare attendance at church on the following Sunday to gaze on her, and the little inn and the group of roughish youths were now attractive. On the next occasion, as he wrote a second love-letter from the maid, he was left alone with Gretchen for a moment. She urged him to abandon the joke. The trick was cruel; the letter was too good for so poor a purpose. "Will you sign the letter to me, then?" he asked eagerly. She signed it, and Wolf jumped up to embrace her. She quietly refused, saying that that was "vulgar," but trusted they would like each other.

It was the first page of the first of Goethe's many love-stories. We have, unfortunately, no description

## Goethe

of Gretchen. We know only that she had prettiness or charm enough to sit as model in a milliner's shop window, and that she was a few years older than Goethe. I gather from the autobiography that she was a relative of the widow who kept the little inn somewhere in the town.<sup>1</sup> Wolf went home to kiss his poem ardently and await the next summons to the inn. The youths now brought him orders for poems that were to celebrate marriages and funerals, and they proposed that the fees should be spent in feasts at the inn. He had, therefore, many excuses to return. Gretchen allowed no familiarity, to him or to any other, but it was enough for him that she should stand near and place her hands on his burning shoulder, while he wrote the poems.

In the spring of 1764 the Archduke Joseph was to be crowned King of Rome at Frankfort, and the feverish preparations favoured his courtship. His father brought out old records of coronations, and Wolf listened until late at night to all the explanations and anticipations of ceremonies. Then there was the joy of explaining it all to Gretchen, in the official capacity of grandson of the Schultheiss and son of an Imperial Councillor, and telling the latest arrivals of Austrian soldiers and gold-laced ambassadors and high-sounding nobles. The groups now gathered nightly at the inn, and the merriment ran to later hours. Wolf secretly procured a key of the house, and used to let himself

<sup>1</sup> The inn is located in the town, not the country, on the authority of one of Goethe's boyhood companions, Passavant.

## The Boyhood of a Genius

in when all thought he was in bed. One night, when the clock struck midnight at the inn, he found that he had not brought his key. Gretchen proposed that they should all pass the night in the room, and the adventure pleased. The innkeeper was with them, and they talked quietly until sleep closed their eyes. Wolf was the last to sleep; Gretchen's head had fallen on his shoulder. He awoke in the early morning to find her smiling before the mirror, and he hurried away to reach his home by a roundabout way—lest his father should chance to be at a window—before all were astir.

Councillor Goethe was too deeply immersed in the civic preparations to notice his son's movements, and it may be said for the mother that, with a Palatine knight on the first floor of the house and a Würtemberg baron on the second, her hands were full. It was a unique opportunity for youthful intrigue, and not unnatural that the son of a distinguished burgher should be much out of doors at so historic a time. The coronation took place on April 3rd, and Goethe was well pleased to see the splendid pageant and ceremony, but its glory paled beside the approaching joy of the evening. He was to stroll among the crowd, "partly disguised," with Gretchen on his arm. For hours they wandered in the merry crowd and admired the illuminations; and when he at length took Gretchen to her home she rewarded him with a kiss on the forehead. He went home to luxurious dreams.

## Goethe

And he awoke to find a grave and tearful mother beside his bed. At the request of his companions he had recommended for the public service to his grandfather a young man of their acquaintance, and this youth had been detected in forgery and embezzlement. Councillor Goethe was beside himself with anger, and Councillor Schneider was below, on the part of the Council, to discover Wolf's relations with the offenders. Wolf sullenly refused to speak; he had a feeling that he might incriminate Gretchen. But the stern Councillor named the inn and his companions, and Goethe told all he knew of the innocent, yet guilty, meetings. When the Councillor had gone, Wolf flung himself on the floor of his room and wept bitterly. He refused to see the further festivities, and threatened to do harm to himself if his companions were imprisoned. In time he learned that Gretchen and his friends were acquitted of complicity, and he returned to his books.

The first idyll was ended, but at least the sweet recollection of it remained for a few weeks. His father had at once engaged a tutor for him, and taken every precaution to prevent him from returning to his former companions. One day Wolf induced his tutor, whom he liked, to tell him the details of the trial. How had dear Gretchen borne herself in court? Excellently, the tutor said; when they had asked her if Wolf had countenanced any misconduct, she had replied that she had kept all mischief from him, as she "regarded him as a child," and had for him the "affection of a sister."

## The Boyhood of a Genius

With one last gust of passion Goethe's first love ended. After all those iridescent dreams, those weeks of throbbing passion, that treasured kiss, he must learn that he had been but a child to her! His boyhood was over now.

## CHAPTER II

### SCHOOLS OF LOVE AND LEARNING

FOR some weeks the fifteen-year-old youth played the part of the embittered lover with artistic correctness. He no longer roamed the streets and quays, or mixed with the craftsmen at their work, or shone in the light of his grandfather's splendour. It seemed to him that, as he passed along, every eye darkened with knowledge of his adventure. But as the spring grew warmer, and the fresh country beyond the walls smiled at him in his lonely attic, he took long walks in the neighbourhood. At first he was alone. He would seek some solitary spot in the forest, where he could improve his skill in drawing and tell the trees and the birds of the follies of men. Then he admitted the company of a student of philosophy, whose grave discourse suited his mood. No system of philosophy was needed, he held, because all high truth was found in either religion or poetry; but he was induced to read—mainly in his father's encyclopædias, one fears—and was attracted to the doctrines of the Stoics.

The sun, however—the great Epicurean teacher—rose higher in the heavens, the blood ran warm in his veins, and he rejoined Cornelia and her friends. They floated down the clear river on hot



## Schools of Love and Learning

summer days, or startled the forest with song and laughter, a very merry party of a dozen or so. With Wolf were his friend Horn, a cheerful little fellow with sparkling eyes and curly black hair, and a few other youths. Cornelia had a pretty circle of maidens—she was far the plainest of them all, Goethe says. One of them, Charitas Meixner, is included in the list of Goethe's lovers by some writers who do not think the list long enough. She was a niece of Moritz, the lawyer to whom half the Goethe house had been let in order to keep out the French. She had been sent from Worms to study at Frankfort for three years; possibly she lived in their house, and was a good comrade to Cornelia and Wolf. No doubt she admired the handsome young poet, with vest of cloth of gold, and he liked her, but she has no higher title to immortality than that.

Was there a different attachment? Writing to a friend two years afterwards, Goethe says that he has, at Leipsic, won a charming maiden without the aid of presents, and he contrasts it with "the trouble I had to win the favours of W——." There was no W—— in Cornelia's circle. It suggests the theatre. Curiously enough, about this time Goethe was seeking admission into a very select and more or less secret society of youths known as the Arcadian Society. The test was virtue. We have the letter in which Goethe confesses his faults—temper, impetuosity, impatience—and pleads that they are not disabling. It seems that he was not admitted, however.

On the whole, it was a happy and healthy time,

## Goethe

and his early letters from Leipsic are full of fond references to those summer days and requests that Cornelia will, on his behalf, kiss the hand of Charitas, or of Lisette Runkel, or Franziska Crespel. But his sixteenth birthday was approaching, and his father, restored to good humour, laid before him the fine program of adolescence which he had designed. He was to go to the University of Leipsic, then to the legal centre at Wetzlar, then to famous Ratisbon; then, after a leisurely tour in Italy and a discreet visit to Paris, he was to return and pluck the ripest honours of his native town.

Wolf shuddered. The dreary life of his father, who had almost followed that program, and the musty world in which, like pale fungous growths, his father's friends vegetated, repelled him. On his own horizon was the shining city of art and letters. To please his father he had, in the last two years, studied a good deal of law and political history, but the work of his heart was writing poetry and dramas. He had given his father a five-hundred page volume of his poems; and one lengthy and very correct piece, "The Descent of Christ into Hell," has escaped the later cremation of his early work. He begged to be sent to Göttingen. The father insisted on Leipsic, and he felt that it meant at least release from Frankfort. He compares himself to one who looks out wistfully between the bars of a cage, and says that, when he left his native town at the end of September 1765, he cared not the least whether he would ever see it again.

## Schools of Love and Learning

So Wolf was even more light-hearted than boys usually are when they leave the home and its ten commandments for the first time. The seven days' journey did not daunt him, and when the coach stuck in the deep mud he helped so vigorously to push it that he injured himself. There were friends in the coach, bookseller Fleischer and his wife, going to the Leipsic fair. They took him to the Feuerkugel (the "Bomb Hotel"), where he hired a couple of pleasant rooms, near them, over the lively courtyard. Leipsic was a little smaller (in population) than Frankfort, but it contrasted as Paris does with London.<sup>1</sup> At Leipsic were the finest theatre and the first university in Germany; its manners and culture were famous; its streets were broad and regular, and strange figures of Poles and Russians and Greeks gave them quite a cosmopolitan aspect; its promenade, to judge by contemporary prints, rivalled that of Cheltenham for shade and gentility. The great fair was just on, moreover, and the youth had plenty of money and of freedom.

One must read the correspondence he at once opened with Cornelia to realise his enjoyment of that first winter. In the second week he writes to her :

" 'What would the King of Holland say if he saw me in this predicament?' cried Herr von Brambarbas. I would almost say: 'What would my wise sister say if she saw me in this room?' You

<sup>1</sup> See Dr. J. Vogel, *Goethe's Leipziger Studentenjahre*, 1910.

## Goethe

would cry out astonished [this in English]: 'How orderly.' Just you look round. Here's my bed; there are my books; there a table decked out far better than your toilet-table. And then—but that's another thing. I remember, you little girls cannot see as far as we poets. Believe me, on the word of a poet, everything is in order."

He bubbles and sparkles, every few days, for the first six months, breaking occasionally into English, Latin and French. He finds that the professors and other gentlemen keep table at midday for students, and he dines at the house of Councillor Ludwig—a fine man of fifty, with little black eyes under bushy ridges, who "talks an awful lot about girls." The meals are superb; what with pheasants, partridges, larks and trout, he has "never eaten so much in his life before." But the talk is serious and erudite. "We learned men," he writes presently, "look on you girls as—as monads." He will, however, direct her studies and raise her above the common girl-level. She is to read Cicero's *Letters* and Tasso, but he will not on any account allow her to read the *Decameron*. Toward the end of the winter he professes more mature sentiments. "I am no more a thunderer as I was at Frankfort," he says, in passable English. He has made the acquaintance of Shakespeare, in Dodd's *Beauties*, and professes a graceful melancholy, though the letters do not show it. In point of fact, he is again in love; but it is love that must not be revealed to Cornelia or any one near his father.

These letters give the most vivid and truthful

## Schools of Love and Learning

picture of his first year at the University, and may be supplemented from his autobiography.<sup>1</sup> His father had given him a prudent introduction to Councillor Böhme, the grave professor of law. He must have smiled when Böhme spoke to him of the prospect of a distinguished legal career. His secret rebellion was not to be disclosed until the Fleischers had returned to Frankfort. Then he went again to the stout little professor and shocked him with a declaration that he had come for letters, not law. Poetry and romance were to Professor Böhme weeds—pretty and coloured, but weeds—in the sober garden of culture. He saw that he made no impression, however, and he gave a hint to his wife. Frau Böhme, a delicate lady, who won great influence over Goethe, persuaded him to submit, and he worked conscientiously at law and philosophy. He reserved the luxury of attending the literary lectures of Professor Gellert, and brought some of his compositions to the gentle lady. She tactfully convinced him that they were puerilities; that art has deep principles to be mastered before you venture to translate every flutter of emotion into flamboyant verse. And one day he went home

<sup>1</sup> This work is entitled *Poetry and Truth*, and the biographer is puzzled to separate the fringe of fiction from the fabric of fact. But its substantial accuracy is more and more confirmed by independent documents, and I use it freely. It is probable that, apart from unconscious errors, only insignificant details have been added to the historical episodes. The title might be translated, "Truth poetically presented." Lewes quarrels with its "tone," and speaks of "the dimmed powers of an aged mind," but even the emotions of Goethe were yet young in his sixtieth year, as we shall see.

## Goethe

and read again his accumulated work in the light of the purer standard she vaguely proposed. He put the mass of papers on the fire, and made so desperate a blaze that the landlady came upon him in alarm.

The serious conversation at Ludwig's table had confirmed the judgment of Frau Böhme. Hitherto he had known only the generous incense of Cornelia and Charitas, or the light praise of his mother's friends. Now he heard men talk of art and science, and suddenly it seemed a long and obscure journey to that enchanting world. It was, on the whole, a sober table. There was one "veritable Falstaff" at the board, and there was a rich young student who talked of the coachmen he had made intoxicated and tossed out of their own coaches, and the miller's asses which he had stolen and driven through the festive town in shoes and stockings; but the University tradition at Leipsic was work with dignity. Even the private families into which Goethe was welcomed were somewhat staid, and very conscious of their superior Leipsic taste. He had to file down the strong old German speech which he affected, and be "no more a thunderer." Young ladies, when they became familiar, smiled at his fine clothes. His father had always had their clothes made at home by the manservant. It was enough that they were of the best cloth. Goethe resisted until one night the popular comedian of the place came on the stage dressed in a suit like his, and the roar of laughter conquered him.

He had hardly fallen into the ways of Leipsic

## Schools of Love and Learning

when the spirit of rebellion and restlessness returned. He quarrelled with the lessons. In law he was receiving elementary instruction which he had already learned at home. As to logic, why should he trouble to analyse mental operations which he performed so easily? His earlier feeling—the feeling that he would before many years embody in the first lines of *Faust*—again took possession of him. This grim and dusty world of books and formulæ was fit only for sapless old men. There was life in the Auerbach tavern, the theatre, the green fields, which were beginning to send the breath of spring through the windows of the lecture-room. His first act of rebellion was to desert the professors for pancakes, which then began to come, hot from the fire, just at the hour of lecture. It was, in other words, the beginning of Lent, and it was soon the early spring, the time when he had met Gretchen—as he now met another maiden.

Disgusted with law, yet unable to find the path to the shining heights which he vaguely aspired to reach, he relaxed and enjoyed himself. At this time, in the early spring, a young lawyer named Schlosser came from Frankfort. He had become private secretary to the Duke of Würtemberg, and was asked to see if all was well with Wolf during the few weeks he was to stay at Leipsic. He was twelve years older than Goethe, but Goethe was drawn to him by his solid culture and character. He dined at the wine-shop of a man named Schönkopf, who kept a table and admitted a few boarders. The wife was a Frankfort woman; the elder daughter,

## Goethe

Anna Katharina, helped to cook the dinner and serve the wine. She was, Goethe curtly says, "young, pretty, sprightly and affectionate." Horn, who came to live at the house, said that she had an "agreeable," though not remarkably beautiful, face, a "fair understanding," but not much education, a great deal of virtue, and so on. The truth is that one cannot discover the charm of Kätchen, as she was familiarly called, or Annchen, as Goethe calls her. The extant painting of her has a flat expressionless face, which might very well please a very virtuous and not very volatile youth. She was three years older than Goethe. But within a month or so Goethe had sought a place at the midday table of the Schökopf family, and was aflame.

Had any rumour of this tender relation to Kätchen reached Frankfort, Councillor Goethe would have exclaimed, "Another innkeeper's daughter," and withdrawn Wolf at once. Hence it was masked, even from his friend Horn, in a quite romantic fashion for many months. As late as August Horn wrote to a mutual friend at Frankfort that Goethe had become unendurable. He had lost his heart to one of the very conventional young ladies of Leipsic, and the airs he put on to please her, the languid carriage, the foppery, the mannerisms, disgusted all his healthy friends. It was not until three months later that Horn discovered that all the languishing for the fashionable lady was a device to distract attention from his courtship of Kätchen. It was in the very house at which Horn lived, in the very room where they drank their wine and



## Schools of Love and Learning

played the piano and the flute at night, that the love-making took place.

But I pass over the hours of tender conversation, the duets and the private theatricals. The smooth course of love is not interesting; it is when the stream breaks on the rocks or rushes passionately through the narrows that it becomes a tolerable theme. Six months after the beginning of the episode—there was no idyll in this amour—Goethe writes to a friend exultantly that he is penning this letter on dear Kätchen's desk. A would-be rival has taken her and her mother to the theatre; but Kätchen has whispered to him to await her return, and—the pen seems to quiver—has given him the two apples which the rival had brought for her. Six months later he mentions her existence to Cornelia; she is "a good girl," and he is "rather fond of her." Six months later (October 1767) he writes to friend Behrisch that he cannot sleep at night; the rival has grown much larger. Even the revels of the Auerbach tavern can comfort him no longer. In November he is "almost without a maid and a friend"; he loves Kätchen as much as ever, but is not sure that she loves him. A few days later "love is accursed" and "the name of woman is frailty." It is a complete confirmation of Goethe's narrative in *Poetry and Truth*. Then the fury moderates, and there is a long silence. He breaks it in March (1768), in answer to an inquiry, to say: "We love each other as much as ever, but rarely see each other. . . . She is an angel, and I am a fool." She shall not, however, suffer the pain of seeing him in the arms of

## Goethe

another before she is mated. In April: "We have separated and are happy." They had ceased to be lovers and had become friends.

There is very little obscurity about Goethe's relations with Kätchen Schönkopf. The account he gives in the autobiography of their separation is correct. For twelve months or more they loved each other, and spent dreamy hours together. There were other young men in the house, and, as Kätchen was not betrothed, they were attentive to the pleasant and sensible maiden. Goethe angrily protested, and made "terrible scenes." She resented his anger as foolish and despotic, and her love gradually cooled. Goethe then made equally violent efforts to conciliate her, and was tortured to find that they were fruitless. She had begun to feel the sharp corners of the diamond of genius. She was, too, of marriageable age, and may have glanced ahead. The rival, Dr. Kanne, was a solid, domestically-minded young man; Goethe had no idea of marriage. We need not suppose, as some do, that he feared his father's opposition; and Bielschowsky's theory that he had a vague consciousness of an ideal to be realised, which marriage would hamper, is strained and premature. The truth was that he always lived in a present sensation. For him love was an enclosed bower, not an avenue leading to an altar. He loved, and lost, as many other young men have done, by bad temper; and it was well for him and for her that he did lose.

It is true that they remained friends. He wrote to her several times after leaving Leipsic. In one

## Schools of Love and Learning

letter he calls her "my love"; in another he wishes they had a chance to live again the past three years. But she was betrothed to Kanne before the end of the year in which she parted from Goethe, and she married him in the following year, 1770. Then the sentimental letters seem to have ceased.

In the amorous autumn of 1767 Goethe had cut their names on a lime-tree. The trees round Leipsic seem to have been richly embroidered by the students with such things. In the following spring he saw the tree again. The fresh sap was flowing down over the name of Kätchen, as if Nature herself wept for his perfidy. The conceit moved him so deeply, he says, that he found in it inspiration for his first notable play, *The Lovers' Moods* (*Die Laune des Verliebten*). He had sketched it at Frankfort, and he now improved it, with his better knowledge of technique, and put into it the blood of a personal experience. It is a pastoral play, in which Goethe and Kätchen (Eridon and Amine) enact their quarrels, with Horn and Konstanze Breitkopf (Lamon and Egle) for foils. It has some fine lines, and is well conceived. Goethe always liked it. Less pleasant is a second play, *The Fellow-Criminals* (*Die Mitschuldigen*), which he wrote at Leipsic. Although it is called a comedy, it is a crudely Mephistophelean satire on the vices and little tragedies that the innocent façade of a house may conceal. It was re-written a year or two later, in the form in which we have it. Goethe admitted that he wrote under the influence of Molière, and that the play is morally and æsthetically unpleasant.

## Goethe

During the later and more disturbing part of his courtship Goethe had fallen into the ways of the wilder students of Leipsic. The Auerbach tavern scene in *Faust* is a page of his experience at the time. He ruined his health with strong beer and bad coffee, fought a duel—a German duel, flirted, and joined in all sorts of pranks. Frau Böhme, in whose delicate presence he had at first enjoyed many an hour, was dead. Councillor Böhme found that he was sketching bigwigs on the margin of his book instead of taking notes. The literary oracle of Leipsic, Gottsched, the decaying ruler of the old poetic school, excited his disdain. One day Schlosser and he had called on Gottsched. They understood that the servant beckoned them, and they entered to find the poet wigless. With one hand he took his wig from the servant, and with the other gave him a buffet that knocked him through the doorway. He represented, in poetry, the bloodless formal process of making verse against which the younger men were rebelling.

A strange companion of Goethe in his boisterous days was Behrisch, the man to whom he describes his breach with Kätchen. He was the tutor of Count Lindenau: a slender, large-nosed man, in his later thirties, who captivated youths by playing boyish pranks with the exaggerated gravity of a man. He wore no colour but grey, but his toilet was an elaborate scheme of shades, and he would spend days in discovering how to introduce a new shade. In some ways he restrained Goethe. When Goethe wanted to publish his poems, he proposed,

## Schools of Love and Learning

instead, to make a beautiful manuscript copy of them. He spent so many days in choosing paper and pens and ink, and deciding on the form and the margin, that he kept Goethe from premature publication. But in other ways he encouraged his rebellious mood. He prompted him to write satires on the work of some of the teachers, and introduced him to certain ladies—possibly of the theatre—who were “better than they were generally believed to be.” For this he lost his position, and left Leipsic; and Goethe wrote a fiery ode on the injustice of the town.

There were, however, quiet families who welcomed Goethe, and we must not magnify his roystering. The bookseller Breitkopf, to whom he may have been introduced by Fleischer, had two musical sons and two daughters, and Goethe spent many an evening in the “Silver Bear,” as their house was called. One of the daughters—sometimes Anna, sometimes Konstanze—is claimed as a lover by the more romantic biographers. The only pretext for this is that he writes to Cornelia that he has “almost given up Konstanze Breitkopf”; he adds, curiously, that she “has read too much.” But Konstanze was the chosen one of his friend Horn, and we must not press this passage. Goethe seems to have been more attached to the sons, who set his poems to music.

The attic of the “Silver Bear” was let to an engraver named Stock, whose art attracted Goethe. There were two young girls, aged five and seven, and one of them, in the days of Goethe’s fame,

## Goethe

recalled many scenes in the attic. Her mother distrusted the lively young student with flowing brown hair and large gleaming eyes. After receiving a lesson in etching or engraving, he would drag her husband away to the students' taverns; and they were poor. He made a warm friend of their little dog, seated it at the table in decent attire, and at Christmas decked a tree for it with all kinds of canine delicacies. His ways disarmed all censure. One day, when Goethe was absorbed in the father's work, a hired teacher was giving the girls a lesson in Scripture. He had chosen an indiscreet chapter of the Old Testament. Goethe angrily seized the book and read to them, with comments, the Sermon on the Mount; and Frau Stock rewarded him by combing his long tangled locks. He learned to etch and engrave with some skill, as the few surviving specimens show.

Friederike Oeser is another lady whose name is found on the longer lists of those he loved. Her father was the director of the Academy of Painting, and was the one man in Leipsic who really assisted Goethe in his search for a true standard of art. Friederike was a young woman of strong sense, good taste, and caustic wit. An idealised drawing of her, by her father, shows a sweet and intelligent face; it omits the disfiguring traces of smallpox, and probably exaggerates the expression of tenderness. Goethe does not give that impression of her. She did not overlook his erratic ways; indeed, he brought his troubles to her. His walks, especially during his bad moods, often lay in the direction of Dölnitz,

## Schools of Love and Learning

where her father had a summer residence. He seems rather to have regarded her as an elder sister.

The three years spent at Leipsic were thus a period of wide and unsystematic education. Of life he learned much; of university lore not so much. His studies of philosophy and law were almost suspended, and his excursions into natural science were those of an amateur. His mind turned more and more to art, but, although he composed hundreds of poems and conceived ideas of many dramas, he felt that he moved in a mist. The better taste of Leipsic had made him vaguely sensible of the defects of the superficial culture, imported from France, which then prevailed in Germany. It was the culture of a stage of exhaustion, subjection and imitation. It lacked sincerity, strength and originality. In Dodd's volume of selections from Shakespeare he had learned the beauty and power of a sincere and independent art. He was eager to breathe in this new world, and could not find the path to it. Then, in the midst of Oeser's useful but feeble counsels, he read the *Laocoon* of Lessing, and hailed it as the first burst of light through the clouds. It showed German culture as a wilderness, in which no great artist could find sustenance. But where could he find it?

Oeser spoke of the great pictures at Dresden, and, without telling any one, Goethe went there. From a student-neighbour he had obtained the address of a Dresden shoemaker who would lodge him. His father had taught him to regard inns as spiders' webs. The shoemaker proved to be original. He

## Goethe

welcomed Goethe with the remark that he was "a strange follower of Christ," as Christ liked the smell of balsam, and Goethe would get very little of that in his home. The lodging mattered little; he lived in the picture galleries, allowing the great visions of beauty to sink deep into him. The Italians, he says, he hardly noticed; he was caught by the strong truth of the Dutch inns and landscapes. He had erred in not admitting Oeser to his confidence. He returned to Leipsic dazed and unbalanced, like one who feels the ground heave after a stormy voyage.

Unfortunately, when he most needed strength and tranquillity, he fell seriously ill. Coffee and strong beer had weakened him, and he had made matters worse by injudiciously adopting certain ideas of "hardening," by means of cold baths and hard beds, which were then being discussed in Leipsic. His neighbour came in one night, in answer to a summons, to find him bleeding seriously from the lungs. For some days it seemed as if his search for beauty in the mists of earth was destined to have an early close. But the affectionate care of his friends, and the attention of many from whom he had expected little sympathy, restored his spirits, and he slowly recovered.

For the rest of his stay in Leipsic, and for long afterwards, he was in a serious mood, and much occupied with religion. The tutor, named Langer, who had replaced Behrisch, entered into some intimacy with him, though he was strictly forbidden to do so. He urged Greek models, and gave Goethe a set of the classic poets in exchange for some



## Schools of Love and Learning

baskets of discarded German literature. But Goethe was tired of Leipsic, and had no further use for it. It would not be pleasant to meet his father with so slender a list of accomplishments, from his father's point of view, but his health was still very poor and he longed for a change. One evening in September he stood by the door of the Schölkopf wine-shop. The door was open and lights burned within, but the recollection of Kätchen filled him with pain, and he turned away. His mature opinion was that he had acted "basely" and "unjustly" to her. In this case the biographer may relieve him of his own heavy censure. We may find ourselves at times reflecting critically on Goethe's early and comfortable theory that one may fall in love at any time without the faintest glance at what lies beyond, but he was "base" neither in his attachment to nor his quarrel with Kätchen Schölkopf. And are there not cases in which we may discern the action of a kindly fate in lovers' quarrels?

## CHAPTER III

### PREPARATIONS FOR "FAUST"

DURING the week which Goethe spent in the lumbering coach, looking out on autumnal scenes, he was oppressed with a forecast of his father's sternness. Since the goal of his life was hidden, he could not even say himself what progress he had made toward it. From his father's point of view he was a culpable, if not criminal, failure. Three precious years had been wasted; the fine program of life, for which the father had paid liberally, had been wantonly trodden under foot; not a serious professor in Leipsic—from his father's point of view—could say a word for him. Councillor Goethe was fully aware of his son's great ability; the mistake he made was to think, as so many parents do, that ability is a plastic and docile thing which one may shape into any form of greatness. He esteemed poetry, as any sensible man would, and had many volumes of it in his handsome library. Poetry was one of the luxuries a man might enjoy when a solid day's work had been done. But to make it the occupation of life, to fancy that the discovery of a new poetic form was a towering ideal for which career might be sacrificed, seemed to him the folly of an intoxicated youth. Yet Wolf was now conscious that he was touched by

## Preparations for "Faust"

the wings of dreams which lifted him far above the puny manhood of Frankfort.

The conflict was postponed, however. The father's lips were sealed when the broken youth, paler than ever, with dark nervous eyes flashing from his haggard face, returned in deep dejection to the home. The mother caressed him as mothers caress the prodigal. Cornelia alone was wholly unaffected by her father's severe view of Wolf's failure. She was herself suffering deeply and silently under his rigorous and joyless training, and was disposed to believe that her brother had found a better world. She came closer to him than ever during the long winter months in which he was confined to the house, the fear of consumption brooding over them all. They invented a language of their own, and, no doubt, embittered the father by speaking it when he or the mother was present. The mother was not initiated.

One day in December Wolf was seriously ill, and the gloom deepened. The simple-minded mother took her Bible, and opened it with confiding hazard. By a happy accident the passage on which her eyes fell was the richly phrased promise of Jeremiah, "Thou shalt yet plant vines upon the mountains of Samaria," and she returned to wrestle with death for her son. The physician, it was whispered in Frankfort, had a secret powder of great efficacy in such emergencies. A relative of the mother's, Fräulein von Klettenberg, was in his confidence, and he was induced to try his remedy. Under cover of the darkness he brought and

## Goethe

administered the powder, and Goethe recovered. It happened at times that some useful element found its way into the appalling compositions which were still used in medicine. The secrecy of the matter had, however, a very plain reason which some of the biographers overlook. In Frankfort a physician was forbidden to make up his own prescriptions.

The mysterious powder had drawn Goethe's attention to the lingering art of alchemy, or the dawning science of chemistry, and he determined to study it. Even those who have never read *Faust* will be familiar with the weird representation on the stage of the aged Faust in the den of an alchemist. "All my works are fragments of the great confession [properly, exposition] of my life," Goethe has said. The magic and mystery which give so impressive a character to the first scene of his great tragedy are reminiscences of this phase of his career. He had known Fräulein von Klettenberg before he went to Leipsic. She was a distant cousin of his mother: a gentle, delicate lady who, after painful experiences and in chronic illness, had found consolation in the Moravian faith. Goethe had received much of his early religious feeling from her, and she now attempted to restore his creed, after the storms of Leipsic. Her intellectual influence was slight, but she again interested him in religion, and he framed a creed which, in its breadth and its Neoplatonist elements, brought him much nearer to her mysticism than to the simple Lutheranism of his mother. She is the "beautiful

## Preparations for "Faust"

soul" whose confessions are included in his novel *Wilhelm Meister*.

From mystic theologians she had passed to mystic scientists, and Goethe followed her with greater interest into the occult world. During his illness, while his father wrote the narrative of his ancient travels below, or gave lessons to his rebellious daughter, the mother and Fräulein von Klettenberg discussed with Wolf, in the upper chamber, the mysterious powder and the dim world from which it came. We may assume that Frau Goethe did not penetrate far. Wolf was fascinated, and his room was presently loaded with strange tomes, such as Welling's *Opus Magocabalisticum*, from which you learned the spells that bind spirits and the processes that unlock the secrets of nature. The frail spiritual lady, in the sober Moravian dress, had a furnace in her house, and spent hours among retorts and alembics. Goethe, too, had a furnace built in his room. He seemed to be on the way to find the "virgin earth" when he extracted a crystalline liquid from crude stones, but at length he tired of the vain calling of reluctant spirits. He had, at least, added some practical knowledge of chemistry to his attainments.

He drew and etched, and wrote poems and tales, as the year advanced, but made no progress in the deeper understanding of art. Once more he gathered his productions and put all, except the two plays he had written at Leipsic, in the fire. He felt that his genius was not born yet, though he was now convinced that it moved within him.

## Goethe

He seems to have spent a year after his recovery in fusing stones in his furnace and fusing creeds to extract their pure quintessence.

Then his father spoke, asking what he intended to do with his life. He spoke harshly, and did not allow for the state of his son's health. For once Goethe speaks of him in the autobiography as "cruel." One can hardly be surprised that his father was impatient; and Goethe confesses that he annoyed his father by criticising the structure of the house, affecting to know architecture. It was agreed at length that he must go and win a degree in law at Strassburg. He consented again with secret reserve. He would take the degree, but what he looked forward to was a fresh plunge into life. Beyond Strassburg was France. Away with philosophy—away with books about life: the stream itself flows by your windows, inviting you to dip. That, he says, was the mood in which he set out for Strassburg toward the end of March 1770. One recognises the first note of *Faust*, of which the design was conceived soon afterwards.

Reading the autobiography alone, we imagine that he reached Strassburg in this mood, and was at once refreshed. He stood in silent and unspeakable admiration before the cathedral, the first great revelation to him of beauty in architecture; he went up to the roof, and loved the green fields of Alsace which stretched, in spring freshness, to the far horizon; he found at once a congenial home and table. But we do not go far before we discover that this part of his autobiography is idealised. In

58

## Preparations for "Faust"

it he will frame the most tender idyll of his life, and the moment his thoughts have passed from Frankfort to Strassburg, the light of the coming love-story begins to irradiate the narrative. The cathedral did, it is true, profoundly impress and instruct him; but the letters he wrote at the time show that he did not for some time lose his depression and recover his full strength.

He found rooms in a house overlooking the Fish Market. It was kept by two old maids named Lauth, and the group of students who dined and lived there were, generally, serious and genial workers.<sup>1</sup> There was an eccentric Frenchman, a retired captain, who had a remarkably bad memory, and had turned it to account by inventing a theory that morality necessarily depended on memory. There was a handsome, witty medical student, Meyer von Lindau, who tinged the grave discussions at table with gaiety. There was a manly young student of theology, Lerse, whose friendship Goethe rewarded by putting him in his first great play, *Götz of Berlichingen*; though the tall blue-eyed youth was not pleased to find, in the first version, his name given to a black-eyed groom. The centre of the group was a pleasant, neat, cultivated bachelor of forty-six, Johann Daniel Salzmann, an official of the Probate Court. He was a judicious man, of sober and precise habit, and easily won the confidence and respect of Goethe.

Wherever Goethe went, from this time onward, he attracted attention. The long pale oval face,

<sup>1</sup> See E. Traumann, *Goethe der Strassburger Student*, 1911.

## Goethe

framed in loosely flowing dark brown locks, the high white forehead and thin Roman nose, and especially the large, luminous deep-brown eyes, were in themselves handsome and attractive, but they were also transfigured by moods which the portrait cannot reproduce: at one time grave with the unconscious mastery of genius, at another illumined by his boyish joy in life. One who joined the group of boarders later, Heinrich Jung (generally called by his pen-name, Stilling), a thoughtful and very religious student in his thirtieth year, has left us an account of his first meeting with Goethe. He and his friend Troost, another new-comer, sat in silence at the board, looking at Goethe. Troost whispered, "That must be an extraordinary man," and, as he listened to the conversation, he added: "The best thing we can do is to keep silent for a fortnight." Jung assented to both. Goethe was in a lively mood, and he regarded him with reserve. Presently some one made fun of Jung's wig, and it was Goethe who silenced the mocker. Jung became a cordial friend.

In repressing the wit of his companion Goethe probably remembered that he had at first suffered similar remarks. He had come to Strassburg dressed with the taste he had learned at Leipsic, but the city on the frontier of France was more exacting. His flowing hair was held to be eccentric, and he was persuaded to put himself in the hands of a hairdresser. The man so trimmed and powdered him that for weeks a natural restraint was put on his buoyancy. He walked about with

60



## Preparations for "Faust"

gravity and stateliness, his hat under his arm, lest the powder should shower upon him. He also learned to play cards, which, on a prejudice implanted by his father, he had refused to do at Leipsic. Then Strassburg demanded that he should waltz—his father had been content to teach him the minuet—and, in learning the art, he ran into a strange adventure.

The master he sought was a Frenchman, who had the assistance of two pretty daughters, in their later teens, with charming French manners. There were few pupils, and the handsome young German was welcome. They prolonged the lessons, sat together afterwards, and Goethe read poetry to them. He presently noticed that the elder girl, Lucinda, showed symptoms of tenderness. He was more tenderly disposed to the younger and brighter Emilia, but as soon as he betrayed this she began to avoid him. This threw him more in the company of Lucinda. He continued, however, in the hope that the coyness of Emilia would disappear.

One night, when he sat alone with the elder girl, she told him that Emilia was consulting a fortune-teller in the next room about her lover. Lucinda was very explicit. Emilia, she said, was betrothed to some young man out of the town, but her heart was free. He laughingly proposed that they should go into the next room and learn what fate had for her. Lucinda held a very serious estimate of the oracle, but she consented. Never had fortune-teller an easier riddle to read, though it was not

## Goethe

easy to tell. She concluded, apparently, that both the girls loved Goethe, and that Emilia was favoured. As she looked gravely at the cards, Emilia exclaimed that there must be unpleasant news for her sister. "Tell it out," said Lucinda, "it won't kill me." The old dame sighed and told her that she loved and was not loved, for a second woman came between. She promised money instead, but Lucinda scorned it. A second and third time the cards gave the same dire assurance that she was not loved, and Lucinda burst into tears and ran from the room. "My position was painful enough," Goethe says; it was worse when Emilia insisted that he should go and console her sister. He persuaded her to accompany him, and for some time they knocked and pleaded at Lucinda's locked door. She made no reply, and Goethe escaped.

A few days later, however, Emilia summoned him. She asked him, in all friendliness, to discontinue his lessons and avoid the house. She had consulted the cards again after his departure, and had learned that she herself came between him and all other women. It seems not unlikely that Goethe was winning her from the absent lover. They moved to the door, and she said that, since they must say farewell, she might express her feeling. "She fell on my neck," he says, "and kissed me most tenderly. I embraced her and pressed her to me." A door opened into the room, and the unfortunate Lucinda, who had been listening behind it, "in a light but becoming night-robe," sprang upon

## Preparations for "Faust"

them. "You shall not be the only one to say good-bye," she cried to her sister, and Goethe found himself pressed tightly against her breast, her black hair resting against his cheek. She held him thus in silence for some time, then released him and stared into his eyes. He tried to take her hand and soothe her, but she broke away and paced the room rapidly. At last she flung herself on the couch, and Emilia sat beside and tried to comfort her. She turned upon the young girl with bitter complaints. "It is not the first heart that you have stolen from me, when you saw an inclination to me," she said. Emilia made a sign to Goethe to go, but Lucinda saw it and sprang up. "I have lost you, I know," she said, "but thou shalt not have him, sister." She grasped him by the hair with both hands and pressed her passionate kisses repeatedly on his mouth. "Now listen to my curse," she ended. "Misery and misery for ever and ever be upon the woman who first kisses these lips after me." Goethe fled.<sup>1</sup>

While he was adding to his lighter accomplishments Goethe had not neglected his serious task. He studied law assiduously, and for a time found interest in it. The historical and antiquarian side of law always had some appeal for him. Even in the early months, however, he did not apply himself to law as his father would have wished. The conversation of the medical and theological students

<sup>1</sup> Several German writers have held that the whole story is fiction. This seems most improbable, and there is no serious reason for thinking it.

## Goethe

at table led him into other fields. He attended lectures on medicine, anatomy, and chemistry, and discussed the heresies of Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot and d'Holbach, which were then engaging Paris. But he learned law enough to pass his candidate's examination six months after his arrival at Strassburg. From that time he was not obliged to attend lectures. It remained only to write a dissertation on some special theme and secure his degree.

Meantime his artistic development was proceeding more rapidly. I have said that the incarnate beauty of the cathedral, an immeasurably finer building than any he had yet seen, recalled his vague dreams and visions. He seemed again to catch a glimpse of the city on the hills whose remote and inaccessible splendour haunted him. An incident that occurred shortly after his coming to Strassburg led him to see a new aspect of it. Marie Antoinette passed through the town on her bridal journey to Paris. A special building was raised for her reception, and Goethe went to see the tapestries with which its walls were draped. He broke into exclamations of disgust when he saw the designs on the walls of the chief room. Not only were they copies of indifferent paintings, but, by some extraordinary piece of official obtuseness, they were chosen to illustrate the most tragic married life in the whole range of history or legend, that of Jason and Medea. On the one hand the officials had tempted Goethe to write a scornful poem because they had ordered that no cripple or other

## Preparations for "Faust"

stricken person should appear upon the route—Goethe contrasted the route of Christ through Palestine; on the other they invited the beautiful young princess to contemplate the bloody vengeance of an ill-used wife. In the smaller rooms of the reception house, however, were tapestries copying the cartoons of Raphael, and Goethe now fully realised the beauty of the Roman school. When the princess had gone, he successfully pleaded that these tapestries should remain for a time, and he spent many hours absorbing their delicacy of form and colour.

Conversation with his serious friends would at least encourage him to formulate his vague feelings. Salzmann had instituted a little "Fine Arts Society," and Goethe and his friends joined it. Poetry would often be the subject of debate. The ideas of the other young men would be lower than the aspirations of Goethe, and he observes that he was in some danger of again indulging his easy power of verse-making to please the young Strassburg ladies of his acquaintance. In the summer, however, there came to Strassburg the one man in Germany who was competent to assist him in his higher development, Herder.

At that time the great critic was tutor to the Prince of Holstein-Eutin, and he had come to Strassburg for the cure of a malady of the eyes. He was only five years older than Goethe, but far more advanced in grasp of the principles of art, and was the chief writer of the new school to which, in spirit, Goethe belonged. One day, when he

## Goethe

went to the hotel, Goethe saw a man in long black silk cloak; a round-faced man with upturned nose, but vast breadth of forehead and piercing black eyes under heavy black eyebrows. He recognised Herder, and spoke to him. Herder recognised a disciple, a youth of promise, and they saw much of each other. They agreed that the French culture was superficial, insincere, formal, and brilliant only with the brilliance of veneer; that Germany had for decades been unable to do more than copy it; and that a new German art, a candid expression of nature and life, strong and solid to the core, was needed. It was what Goethe had felt; Herder put it in more definite and confident terms. He encouraged the study of Shakespeare, and pressed also the study of the Old Testament, of Homer, of Ossian (the brilliant imposture which had not yet been detected), and of Swift.

The clinging to Herder is honourable to Goethe's character. Herder had the nose of Socrates and the mouth of Plato. He was bitter and satirical one hour, unrestrainedly ridiculing the surviving fragments of Goethe's earlier poetic taste; at another hour he would be amiable and cordial. Goethe felt that he was regarded as a boy, but recognised wisdom, and endured much. He was present when the operation was performed on Herder's eyes, and was his constant companion in the weeks of recovery.

Through Goethe the ideas of Herder suffused the literary circle at Strassburg. There was already some welcome of Rousseau's gospel of nature, and

## Preparations for "Faust"

the group was converted easily to Homer, Shakespeare and Ossian. They professed a great scorn of French culture, admired the Greeks and the English, and looked forward to the growth of a corresponding art in Germany. Imitation, a recent writer says, weighed like an Alp on the culture of Germany. It was to be shattered, and a deep and warm contact with nature would inspire a new and sincerely German poetry. So they sought their way back to nature. They turned their backs on school-rooms and dancing-rooms, and sat for hours on the roof of the cathedral, surveying the green country and drinking bumpers to the setting sun. They took horse and rode over Lower Alsace for many days in the late summer, linking themselves to the life and work of the people and enjoying the rocks and valleys.

The new phase had at least the effect of restoring Goethe to complete health. The long illness at Leipsic and Frankfort had greatly weakened his nerves. The livid sights of the anatomy school and the louder noises of the street pained him, and he was unable to look down from the height of the cathedral without trembling. Mistaking a symptom for a disease, he had taken the heroic course of forcing himself to look on horrors, or listen to the roll of drums, or stand on giddy heights, until he was accustomed to them. He now found a deeper remedy in his zeal for nature. All his buoyancy was restored by the autumn of 1770. He had leisure, now that the attendance of law-lectures was unnecessary; he had plenty of money, and he saw at

## Goethe

least part of the path to the world of ideal art. He was at last taking the dip into life which he had promised himself when he left Frankfort. Herder described him, two years later, as "like a sparrow." It was a recollection of his exuberance in the autumn of 1770. It was Faust sallying into the streets; and within a few weeks he met his Margaret, and entered upon the great idyll which was to end in tragedy.

Two fellow-boarders, Engelbach and Weyland, had accompanied him in the ride through Alsace. Weyland, a theological student, was a neighbour and close friend of Goethe. He belonged to the district, and spoke at times of a very pleasant family, to which he was related, in a village about eighteen miles from Strassburg. The father was the pastor of the village, and of the four children the elder two were very amiable and spirited young women, with whom one could spend merry days in the country. The younger of the two, Friederike, was a beautiful girl of charming character, and the family was very hospitable. Weyland proposed in the early part of October that they should spend a few days at the parsonage, and Goethe set out with him on that path to Sesenheim which has since become a pilgrims' way for reverent admirers of the great poet.



## CHAPTER IV

FRIEDERIKE BRION

No other chapter in the life of Goethe has been written by him with such exquisite and sympathetic art, or been discussed so much by later writers, as that which tells of his love of the simple country maiden, Friederike Brion. Antagonistic schools of German writers have arisen out of the discussion, and the problem of Goethe's abandonment of her has inspired endless speculation. Nor is the sceptic wanting. There are some who hint that there is more "poetry" than "truth" in the pretty narrative which we have in the autobiography. They regard it as an idyll of letters rather than of life, and suggest that the great poet has made a charming and moving romance out of some not uncommon episode of student life.

We have seen that other incidents are regarded with suspicion, or rejected outright, by some writers because we know them only from the autobiography. "Poetry and truth" is an unhappy title for a narrative of fact; more unfortunately still, it is, to some extent, a correct title. Events which lay dim and remote in the memory of Goethe, when he wrote the autobiography, received colour and richness of detail from his artistic feeling. But this does not justify a scepticism which would erase whole adventures,

## Goethe

such as the episodes of Gretchen and Lucinda, from the chronicle of his life. In the introduction to *Poetry and Truth* Goethe plainly promises an historical account of his career, and explains that he has been at great pains to obtain documents which would supplement his memory. He merely warns us that "the treatment [Handlung] is half-poetical, half-historical." He has, in other words, given body at times to some ghost of a reminiscence, or considered the susceptibilities of living persons. We have a mass of testimony to the simple accuracy of the earliest part of his narrative.

In regard to the Friederike narrative, in particular, he expressly assured Eckermann that "everything described in it really took place, but nothing occurred precisely as it is described." This is unsatisfactory, but it at least limits scepticism to unimportant details. We shall see that a few imaginative touches have been given to the account to make it fuller and more pleasant to read, and a few known details have been omitted. But the surviving letters and poems which Goethe wrote at the time, and the statements gathered later from members of the Brion family and old inhabitants of the district, confirm the narrative. We will rely more confidently on these documents, but, with the light reserve that a pleasant trait here and there, of no historical importance, may be imaginative, we will tell the story as Goethe wrote it. Years afterwards his secretary told of the agitation and tenderness with which he dictated those beautiful pages.

## Friederike Brion

On October 15th, 1770, Goethe wrote to a friend, Katharina Fabricius, that he had just returned from the country, where he had spent a few days with some "very nice people," who had "charming daughters." It would therefore be about October 10th when he set out with Weyland for Sesenheim, or Sessenheim, as it was really called. They rode in high spirits, for Goethe was, he says, playing a trick upon the country folk. Little dreaming that he might care to make an impression in an obscure rural parsonage, he had put on old clothes, discarded his powdered queue, and borrowed the character of a poor theological student. They left their horses at the inn, and walked to the house. It was a small weather-worn building, with old thatched roof and decaying windows, standing back from the road in a poor garden, overtopped by the surrounding trees. Pastor Brion, a quiet, kindly little man, in his forty-third year, welcomed them, and summoned the family. His wife, some seven years younger than he, was a tall thin woman of refined and intelligent features. Presently Maria Salomea, the eldest daughter, a young woman in her twenty-first year, burst into the room for a moment, and then went out into the fields for her sister. After a time Friederike came; "a star appeared in the rustic firmament."

It is probable enough that Friederike at once fascinated Goethe's imagination. The testimony of old inhabitants in later years fully confirmed, and added a little to, Goethe's description of her, except that she is now known to have been a ripe young

## Goethe

woman of nineteen, instead of a less mature girl of sixteen.<sup>1</sup> She was "a creature of milk and blood," a woman of the village said long afterwards, when pilgrims began to make inquiries at Sesenheim. Her skin was soft and white, and she was so slim and graceful of build, and so buoyant of step, that at times she seemed not to touch the ground as she ran from place to place. She had a long sweet face, with merry blue eyes and richly coloured cheeks and lovely teeth, and a mass of fine light hair which seemed too large for her little head to carry. The fact that her parents feared consumption confirms this impression of delicate beauty. And if we imagine this lithe and graceful figure dressed in the old national costume—close-fitting white bodice, black apron, and a skirt that exposed a pair of "the neatest of ankles"—we have some idea of the vision that captivated the young poet. The dark dilapidated house and the quiet simple family only framed it the more effectively.

Goethe sat uneasily in his miserable disguise, and listened to the exchange of information about an apparently infinite number of aunts and uncles and cousins. It was Friederike who noticed his isolation, and talked with him. Then, at her father's command, she played a little and sang a little, but she broke off discontentedly, and asked them to come out into the fields and hear her sing Alsatian and

<sup>1</sup> See P. D. Lucius (a later pastor at Sesenheim), *Friederike Brion* (1877). The ages are confidently gathered from the confirmation-records at the parsonage. See also Düntzer's *Friederike von Sesenheim* (1893), Müller's *Sesenheim wie es ist* (1894), and Bielschowsky's *Friederike und Lili* (1906).

## Friederike Brion

Swiss songs, instead of the vapid melodies set to the harpsichord. She was full of life and joy in life, an embodiment of Goethe's ideal; yet, while her elder sister shrieked and rolled on the ground at some excessive joke, Riekchen, as they called her, never lost her poise.

At supper Goethe was moody and uncomfortable. He tells us that he was struck to find himself suddenly living in the very family of the *Vicar of Wakefield*, which Herder had recently lent him. When a young son (Christian) entered the room, he almost cried out: "Thou also, Moses." He omits to tell us that there was a third daughter, Sophia, a girl of thirteen or fourteen; and indeed it seems that Herder did not show him Goldsmith's work until a month afterwards. However, as the good wine passed generously round, he entered into the lively conversation, and nearly forgot that he was a shabby student of theology. Weyland noticed it, and proposed a walk in the moonlit fields. He took Salomea, and left Goethe to walk arm-in-arm with Friederike and listen, almost in silence, to her pleasant description of the little world about them. She trusted that the student would not be an exception to the rule; everybody who had ever visited them had come again. And when at last the two youths retired to the guest-chamber, it was to sit and discuss the adventure far into the night. Had they penetrated his disguise? So little, Weyland said, that they had actually inquired about that rollicking young poet at Strassburg of whom he had written to them. Was Friederike heart-free? But

## Goethe

he did not care whether she was or not; he would win her if she was a bride.

In the morning light he bitterly contemplated his image in the glass. The old grey coat, with short sleeves, no longer amused him. He was for a moment tempted to steal the fine clothes which lay by Weyland's bed. When his companion awoke, and laughed at him, he stole from the house, saddled his horse, and galloped toward Strassburg for his own costume. At the larger village of Drusenheim, however, he noticed a youth at the inn who was about his own size, and it occurred to him to give a more pleasant turn to the adventure. He borrowed the clothes of this youth, who was known to the Brions, and returned to the vicarage. How he drew his hat over his eyes and deceived one after another until it came to the turn of Friederike, and how successfully he burst on them all in his real character, is described at great length in his narrative. But here we do not know how to draw the line between fact and the pleasant embroidery of fiction.<sup>1</sup> The morning passed merrily in playing this little comedy; in the afternoon the four young people sat in the wood, and Goethe, who had already great skill in story-telling, told them the story of

<sup>1</sup> As the pretext for coming to the house in the character of George he says that a child had been born at Drusenheim, and the youth was, in accordance with custom, to take a cake to the pastor. But Pastor Lucius declares that Drusenheim was a purely Catholic village, and that records make it doubly sure that no Protestant child was born there at the time. This, however, is the only positive fiction found in the story by the higher critics.

## Friederike Brion

*The New Melusine*, which he afterwards wrote and included in *Wilhelm Meister*.<sup>1</sup>

He left them silent under the spell of his wonderful art, and, with Weyland, returned to Strassburg. We can imagine the feelings of the rustic maiden, from whom his admiration had not been concealed. Of his own feeling we have a record. He wrote to Friederike on the day after his return. "Dear, dear friend," the letter (as it was sent, probably) opens; and it closes: "Certainly, mam'selle, Strassburg never before seemed to me so empty. I trust it will be better when the recollection of our merry frolics is less keen, and I no longer feel so strongly how good and pleasant my friend is. But can I, or would I wish to, forget it? No, I would rather endure the pain, and write often to you." It is a pretty letter, far warmer than compliment required, somewhat cooler than passion would dictate. He was in love, but not yet at the white heat implied in the autobiography.

He returned to Herder and work and the distracting problem of art. In spite of hard work in law and medicine he was uneasy. Herder had "torn aside the veil that had hidden from me the poverty of German literature" and "shaken the stars from my firmament." He had, it is true, pointed to other stars, but there must be no imitation; in fact only one of them, Hamann, whom he

<sup>1</sup> Critics object that such a story could not possibly have been told to a clergyman's daughters. But no one supposes that the story was told as it was written years afterwards. One may add that Goethe's descriptions of the feasts at the vicarage do not suggest an ascetic temper.

## Goethe

did not understand, was German. He must find a like inspiration, and in his own soil. Two large ideas already shaped themselves in his mind. One was the design to make a play, as he afterwards did, of the old German story of Götz of Berlichingen. The other was the idea of *Faust*.

“The instructive story of *Faust* in the toy-theatres rang and hummed in my mind in many tones. I too had wandered in all fields of knowledge, and was soon convinced of the vanity of them all. I had also tried life in all its forms, and had always returned more discontented and tortured than ever. Like many others, I bore these things about with me, and I brooded over them in hours of solitude, though I wrote nothing.”

This passage of the autobiography refers to the period just before he visited Sesenheim. It is true that he did not write the first scenes of *Faust* until three years later, but it is clear that the idea haunted him. We know that the old story was at that time enacted on the streets in the wandering puppet-shows, or doll-theatres, as “Punch and Judy” is still played in England. In 1770, Goethe’s twenty-first year, the idea of applying the tragedy to his own experience would easily occur. He had explored every field of knowledge of which he heard companions speak with enthusiasm—law, theology, mysticism, philosophy, history, chemistry, and medicine—and had found satisfaction in none; while art remained the remote and dimly shining vision of his dreams. He had, too, tried life in all the forms



## Friederike Brion

in which students prize it, and had been sated. That was his mood in the spring and summer of 1770. Then came the zeal for nature and wine: then Margaret—for Friederike is Margaret—entered the scene.

We do not know precisely when he next met Friederike. The visits to Sesenheim in his narrative are not dated, and biographers generally regard them as confused in arrangement. He says that the second visit was when "some holiday" interrupted the medical course he was following; that he instantly took horse and galloped to Sesenheim. But the circumstances clearly show that this refers to Easter, and we know that he had previously gone in the course of the winter. The poem, "I come again, ye golden children," laughs at the effort of winter to confine him in his warm room, and keep him from them. As it speaks of fireside games and garlands, it probably means that he spent Christmas at Sesenheim. The next visit seems to have been at Easter. He worked hard at the medical course during the winter, and when the last day of the term came, the professor, with an eye on Goethe, urged his students to go out, on horse or foot, and enjoy "the glorious country." Goethe ordered a horse at once. Weyland was not to be found, but he would not postpone his start. He galloped wildly over the roads, and finished his ride by moonlight, in face of a storm. The innkeeper told him that a guest was expected at the parsonage, and he was disappointed. He had hoped that he would be the only guest. But when he found the two sisters

## Goethe

sitting before the door, and heard Riekchen whisper, "Didn't I tell you? Here he is," he perceived that he was the expected guest. This was clearly at Easter-eve. They knew of the holiday, and felt that he would use it to come to them; and the professor's reference to "the glorious country" and the fact that the sisters sat without the house in the moonlight point to the early spring.

I doubt if Goethe was seriously in love until that visit, when the fresh spring country and the brighter charm of Friederike stirred his blood. He walked with her on Easter-morning, and helped to plan the entertainments of the day. Friends came to the house from the whole countryside, and they dined in the open air and played their rustic games: games which Goethe dreaded because the customary forfeit was a kiss, and between him and the ripe lips of Friederike hung the dark curse of Lucinda. She looked so sweet and dainty in the early sun, and led the company with such ease and good sense, that he passed far beyond admiration. After his return to Strassburg he began a regular correspondence with her, and sent her some ardent poems, and in a few weeks he was back at Sesenheim for a long visit. Since we know from one of his letters that he was there at Whitsuntide, we may assign this long stay to that date—the latter part of May and beginning of June.

The further course of the village idyll is not so clear. In the autobiography the prolonged stay, or the repeated visits, in May and June are the golden period of his passion. Friederike and he, enjoying

## Friederike Brion

the full trust of her parents, wander over the sunny country or sail the Rhine day after day. The Whitsuntide holiday had brought relatives from all parts of the district to the vicarage; Friederike and he make excursions to their homes in the weeks that follow. Clearly, he was regarded as her lover, and we appreciate the pride with which she introduced the brilliant and handsome student to aunts and cousins in those simple homesteads of the Rhine valley. She kissed him quietly in their presence, breaking the curse of Lucinda, he thought. Then "a trial fell on our love"; though, on reflection, he will not allow that it was a trial. Frau Brion and her daughters came to stay with relatives in town for a week or two. Their German costume seemed less picturesque in a Strassburg drawing-room; the rustic contrast to the city toilets of their cousins rather jarred than pleased. Salomea, moreover, behaved very foolishly, as an essentially rustic maiden might. Their departure was a relief to everybody. But Goethe still visited them, and the tearful farewell, with which he closes the narrative a month or two later, is abrupt and puzzling.

It has been thought that this narrative is merely arranged to excuse, in some measure, his abandonment of Friederike; that the visit to the town, in particular, is either invented or misplaced. It seems to me that the only defect of the narrative is the reluctance to admit that there were currents undermining Goethe's love for Friederike as soon as it arose fully in his consciousness. Much ingenious speculation has been expended on his abandonment of the beau-

## Goethe

tiful girl. For one writer a consciousness of his genius and of the stern duty to develop it forced him to cut the passion out of his heart; for another he was guided by material considerations, or the fear that his father would not consent. These theories, which would make him sacrifice a deep and tender love to other considerations, do him little honour. Few writers seem to have considered as seriously as it deserves Goethe's own explanation. He says:

"To these distractions and consolations I surrendered myself, even to intoxication, the more willingly because my passionate relation to Friederike now began to cause me anxiety. A youthful sentiment of this kind, inspired by chance circumstances, may be compared to a rocket that is sent up in the night. It ascends in a smooth line of light, mingles with the stars, nay, even seems for a moment to linger below them; but then it descends, following the same path in a reversed direction, and ends its course in destruction."

This is the simple truth in regard to Goethe's love. He has puzzled only by his very natural reluctance to trace the downward course of his passion, or to tell the moment at which the rocket turned. We can, however, follow the story with some confidence.

We have five letters which Goethe wrote from Sesenheim to his friend Salzmann, and they throw an important light on this situation. They are without date, but one is written in Whitsun-week, and may be taken as the first. He acknowledges that

80

## Friederike Brion

he is not happy. The "little one" is ill, consumption is feared, there are long faces in the house. He himself is unwell, and, what is worse, he has a "*mens conscia*, but, alas, not *conscia recti*." What the scruple is that makes him uneasy he does not say. In the next paragraph, in fact, he describes how, on Whit-Monday, he danced with Salomea from two until twelve o'clock at a festival they had arranged in the village. "You should have seen us—I was absorbed in it. Yet if I could say, I am happy, it would be better than all that." His head is "like a weathercock."

The second and third letters indicate the same mood. "The world is so beautiful, so beautiful. Happy the man who can enjoy it." He quotes the sceptical lines which Hadrian wrote on his death-bed about his "vague little soul" and its uncertain journey.<sup>1</sup> In another letter, usually accepted as the fourth, he writes :

"The sweetest spot, people who love me, and a circle of friends! Are not the dreams of thy childhood fulfilled? I often ask myself, as my eye reaches the horizon of this felicity: Are these not the enchanted gardens which thou soughtest? They are, they are. I feel it, dear friend, and feel that man is not a whit happier for having attained what he desired. The makeweight, the makeweight, which fate always adds to our happiness!"

<sup>1</sup> A small coincidence may be noted here. In writing on the Emperors of Rome I at this point (Hadrian's death) quoted some lines of *Faust* as expressing the Roman temper. I was then unaware that Goethe had actually quoted Hadrian to indicate his mood.

## Goethe

In the fifth, and most probably last, letter he says :

“My eyes won’t keep open, though it is only nine o’clock. What a fine thing order is. Up late last night, whipped out of bed early this morning. It is much the same in my head as in my room. . . . It is not quite gay in my soul. I am too wideawake not to see that I am attempting to grasp shadows. However—my horse is saddled to-morrow morning, and then good-bye.”

Comparing these contemporary confessions with the autobiography, we seem to understand. The Whit-Sunday festival, to which he was invited, evidently tired him. Friederike was surrounded by her real world : a world of rough noisy country folk, who severely strained his artistic sympathy with “the people.” They boorishly made pencil-marks on the fine plan of a new house which he had made for Pastor Brion. Wine flowed freely from breakfast onward; the games and dances were boisterous. Goethe had an appalling nightmare the following night. The picnics and excursions with Friederike in the following weeks restored his enjoyment, but the spectre could not be banished. Friederike framed in the dilapidated vicarage was charming enough, especially to a youth who did not connect love with marriage : Friederike surrounded by a regiment of uneducated country cousins, all regarding him as a future member of the family, was a different matter. She remained for ever in his heart the same sweet and beautiful girl, but the frame

## Friederike Brion

changed, and the picture receded from him. "I come—or I don't come—the event will show," he was replying to Salzmann's summons to return. He loved her, and found it best to be with her; but there was a poison at work in his love. The rocket was descending. In her world no one would understand his life-long idea that love was a gift of the gods, like a flower or a peach, to be plucked for its fairness, without calculation of the morrow. He desired not the body, so that even when he felt love for one who was betrothed to his friend, like Lotte, or one who was married, like Frau von Stein, he never hesitated to enjoy it. In the Rhine valley, among these simple folk, a kiss at once suggested betrothal and marriage, or betrayal and desertion. The rocket turned.

He lived between Sesenheim and Strassburg for weeks. He had a racking cough, and the country suited him, he told Salzmann. Then there came a fortnight in which he would be confined to Strassburg, so the Brions accepted a long-pressed invitation to town.<sup>1</sup> Their relatives were in good circumstances, and the two Brions, in white bodices and short skirts, looked very rustic amongst them. Salomea felt it, and annoyed Goethe by her very unconventional ways. The whole experience enforced this growing uneasiness. Friederike was

<sup>1</sup> German writers strangely insist that Goethe has transferred this visit from the winter to the summer. The reasons they give do not justify the alteration. To say that country people rather visit the town in winter than in summer is untrue, and the circumstance that the scene is always indoors is quite in accord with Goethe's expressed aim—to contrast Friederike in country and in town.

## Goethe

serene and sensible as ever, but her world oppressed him. He still wrote often to her, and made occasional visits to Sesenheim. She had no presentiment that the end was near. Salomea alone knew it, and spoke to Goethe of his approaching departure from Strassburg.

He had now a task in Strassburg which would excuse the infrequency of his visits. To secure his degree in law he had to write a dissertation. Quixotically he chose a theme of an eccentric and unacceptable character. He would prove that a system of worship should be formulated by the authorities and enforced upon all. Even Protestants in Germany were divided, and there were, in the west, great numbers of Catholics and many Jews. The dean read his dissertation with uneasiness, and intimated, politely, that it was inexpedient to print it. They would allow him to adopt the alternative way of securing a degree: to defend a number of chosen theses in public. Friend Lersé appeared as his opponent, and mischievously pressed him on some of the paradoxical or ironical statements he had undertaken to defend. That "the law is the best of all studies" was too heavy a witticism to deceive even the professors. However, the fifty-six theses were championed, and the day ended with a merry banquet. On August 6th, 1771, he became a licentiate in law, and, as that was equivalent to the doctorate at Strassburg, he was henceforth fully entitled to be called Dr. Goethe.

His work at Strassburg was now over. There were professors who appreciated his genius, and,



## Friederike Brion

through Salzmann, held out to him the prospect of an official position and a chair of letters or philosophy or history. He had, too, become greatly attached to the friends who shared his enthusiasm for Shakespeare, or drank beakers with him to the setting sun, or discoursed on questions of religion or poetry. The poet Lenz, a dapper little man with blue eyes and blonde hair, who was later to make love to Friederike and enmity to Goethe, had recently joined the circle. But his father expected him, and there was no excuse to linger. Six months earlier he might have invented one.

He had the courage to go to Sesenheim to say farewell, but, when he saw the delicate girl, he was unable to tell her the whole truth. He acknowledged years afterwards that he was conscious that the separation might, in the circumstances, cost Friederike her life. His fine philosophy of love began to show another facet. He spent at Sesenheim a few "painful days, the details of which I cannot remember." She knew now that it was the end. The tears dimmed her blue eyes when, on horseback, he stretched his hand to her for the last good-bye. Then he rode in anguish toward Strassburg, and soon left that city behind him.

As he rode away, he says, he had a vision of himself, in grey gold-laced costume riding toward Sesenheim. He had never worn such a coat, and he recalled the vision with wonder when, in 1779, he found himself once more on the way to Sesenheim, in grey gold-laced coat. Friederike had survived the grave illness which followed his departure,

## Goethe

and received him with quiet dignity. After that he never saw her again, but her image haunted his memory and inspired his work. He was tormented with remorse. He had written, on returning to Strassburg, to convey the unutterable farewell, and her simple reply had torn him. He felt remorse for the pain he had caused, not for any misconduct. Bielschowsky, holding a very different estimate of Goethe's self-command than that of Lewes, takes refuge in the maxim that "the great genius, less master of himself than other men are, must, like the mighty forces of nature, follow his own inherent laws." There is no need to grant this licence to genius. Kätchen he had loved and lost, as other men do: Friederike he loved and ceased to love, as other men do.

Biographers, lingering and struggling over the village idyll, have attempted to trace the later life of Friederike Brion. We know that in the year after Goethe's departure the young poet Lenz visited Sesenheim, and made passionate love to Friederike. We do not know how it came about that the Brions tolerated the dallying of another brilliant student from the University, and we have only the unreliable boast of Lenz that his love was received. Then there is a disputed—fiercely disputed—page in the life of Friederike. Early and reverent pilgrims to Sesenheim were pained to find a deep-rooted tradition in the district that she had fallen, and that it came of a common intrigue with the Catholic priest of Sesenheim. As several members of the Brion family confirmed this fall, and Goethe heard it in

86

## Friederike Brion

silence, there is grave evidence; though the inculpation of the priest is feeble. The birth is placed in 1787. Salomea had married, and left the home, in 1782: the mother died in 1786: the father followed in 1787. The home was dissolved, and Friederike went to live with her brother.

We find her again, strangely, living with relatives at Versailles and Paris in the early days of the Revolution; from there she passed to Baden, about 1793, to live in the house of the clergyman who had married Salomea. There, later inquirers found, "Tante Friederike," a gentle, ageing, kindly woman, ended her days in parochial honour. Goethe had become a world-poet, and the first minister of a prince. She spoke little of him, always with respect, and in her sixtieth or sixty-first year (1813) she joined her father.

## CHAPTER V

CHARLOTTE BUFF

THE second home-coming of Wolf, about the middle of August 1771, had an element of triumph. Councillor Goethe welcomed the degree, and, after grave examination, decided that the rejected dissertation was solid and brilliant. He could not understand the reluctance of the authorities to print it. Wolf had at last entered the path which led to the austere dignities of law and State. The father might now venture to admire the lighter occupations of his leisure hours. He made a volume of Wolf's notes, poems and drawings. Frau Goethe reflected the satisfaction of her husband, and protected it. Wolf had loitered at Mannheim to admire the sculpture, and had then, in artistic mood, picked up a wandering harper by the way, and promised him a lodging in his father's house. The mother hurriedly compromised, and found the youth a decent lodging in the town.

The autumn passed in "mourning a lost love." Friederike's letter had shown Goethe that he had "wounded the fairest of hearts to its very depths." He took long solitary walks through the fading country and over the melancholy hills, muttering his poems, brooding over the large vague shapes of tragedies which arose in his mind. Young men who

## Charlotte Buff

had some inner burden to bear were attracted to him, and the gay were repelled. He would sometimes, to assert his solitude, dine at an inn within a stone's throw of his comfortable home. His friends, smiling, called him "The Wanderer," and he composed a "Wanderer's Storm-Song," and sang it in the face of the gale. For months, apparently, he maintained this wild healthy life. Maidens sighed for him—he learned years afterwards—but he closed his eyes to women. At length hard walks and hard work wore away his morbid dreams. Cornelia persuaded him to be "a wolf" no longer to her circle of adolescent maidens, who admired him so much. The cheerfulness of Horn and the good sense of the Schlosser brothers tempted him back to civilisation. He exchanged lusty rides for brooding walks, fenced and learned skating. Klopstock had, by his enthusiastic poem, revealed to youthful Germany the glories of the ice. When the cold came, Goethe sprang out of bed with the lines on his lips. He skated all day and far into the night, ringing out, with his companions, the verses of Klopstock.

He was the happier because he began at length to master the artistic impulses that stirred in him. He read the Greek tragedians and Shakespeare and the Bible assiduously, and his dreams began to take definite shape. Cæsar, Mohammed, Dr. Faustus, and Godfrey of Berlichingen were towering figures of tragedy that stood out in the welter of his mind. With sound judgment he turned from the grander figures, and concentrated on the old German story of Godfrey. He read antiquities,

## Goethe

steeped himself in the life of the sixteenth century, and began to compose in his mind. The subject suited his new ideal. It offered analogies to Shakespeare's historical subjects, and it had all the strength and sincerity of growing out of German soil in a less finicking age. He recited lines to Cornelia, and she urged him to write. Impetuously as ever, he seized the pen and wrote the first scenes in a day. She admired, but said that he was incapable of persevering. He set his teeth, and within six weeks produced his first great play, *The Story of Godfrey of Berlichingen, of the Iron Hand, dramatised*. We will notice it when it is re-written and published, as *Götz of Berlichingen*, in 1773.

In another important direction he found means to articulate his growing ideas. He discussed them with Horn and the Schlossers, and they brought friends into the new school. It became an important centre of the movement which was to be known in history as the "Storm and Stress" (*Sturm und Drang*) movement. It was in German culture what the French Revolution was in the political world. The old, pretty, complacent, soulless world had been disturbed by the lawless lines of Klopstock, the dark rumbling verses of Hamann, the criticisms of Lessing, Winckelmann and Herder. The young men were fired, and, in storm and stress, carried the revolution. The Frankfort group conducted a journal, the *Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen*, as an organ of this virile movement, and Goethe was one of the chief contributors. They

## Charlotte Buff

rent into tatters the productions of the old school as they appeared, and formulated, in fragments, the new gospel.

At neighbouring Darmstadt was another literary set, and it furnished a most important ally. Herder had spoken to Goethe of a Darmstadt man, named Merck, and, as his walks often lay in the direction of that town, he made his acquaintance. Johann Heinrich Merck will long be remembered, not only as one who had a great and useful influence on Goethe, but as the chief model of his Mephistopheles. He was War Councillor at Darmstadt: a tall thin man, with sharp prominent nose and restless blue-grey eyes. He was eight years older than Goethe, and, having a solid character, level judgment, and fine culture, was well fitted to restrain and help him. He was both witty and penetrating, and therefore sarcastic. He saw folly everywhere, and said so. But he perceived the exceptional ability and promise of Goethe more clearly than Herder had done, and he did not make the mistake of ridiculing Goethe's weaknesses. He was much dreaded for what Goethe calls his "Swift-like venom"—Goethe found great delight in Swift—and this gives piquancy to his association with a very choice group of ladies at Darmstadt to whom he introduced Goethe.

It was the age of Rousseau. But Rousseau's curious gospel of nature was open to two very different interpretations. It sent young men riding wildly over the country, or emptying bottles of wine on the roofs of cathedrals, in robust com-

## Goethe

munion with nature. It equally justified young ladies, and others whose sex seemed a little confused, in a cultivation of soft sentiment which was the antithesis of robustness. Such a group had gathered at Darmstadt round the æsthetic and spiritual feminist, Leuchsenring. They wrote exquisite letters to each other, and painted pretty sentiments on silk ribands, and preserved these gifts of their friends in artistic caskets. Leuchsenring had a famous collection, which was included in his luggage when he travelled.

Merck had been drawn into this circle by his wife, and we may assume that he did not remain to pray. The ladies were, however, very fond of him, kissing and embracing him most tenderly when they met. He introduced Goethe, who became almost a priest of the cult. His singularly large nature responded to both interpretations of the gospel of nature. In *Götz* we have the incarnation of the one, in *Werther* the most superb expression of the other; and they are equally sincere. He skated like a young giant one day, and painted ribands the next. As the spring returned, he fell into his usual vernal mood, and spent many days at Darmstadt, enjoying the spiritual embraces of the pretty maids of honour (of the Hesse-Darmstadt Court), offering poetic sacrifice to Psyche with them on the rocks in the forest, reciting his poems to them, letting them dance round him, like a ring of artistic shepherdesses, in the meadows. They were a varied group. Caroline Flachsland, the betrothed of Herder, was probably one of the more sober.



## Charlotte Buff

But a friend of hers, Luise von Ziegler, a maid of honour at the Court, shared her meals with a pet lamb, adored the moon, and had her tomb erected in her garden. Of another maid of honour, Fräulein von Rousillon, whose sentimental name was Uranie, Goethe became so fond that, when she died in the following spring, his lamentations gave rise to speculation. We need not shed a tear over the absent Friederike. Lenz was already staying at Sesenheim.

Over this happy and industrious spring fell the shadow of his father's stern ideal. It was time to resume the program. Goethe must go to Wetzlar, where was the Imperial Chamber of Justice, and learn the practice of law. Councillor Goethe lacked humour. The Imperial Chamber was the most excellent place in Europe for extinguishing the last respect for law in an insurgent youth. Twenty thousand cases awaited its decision, at the rate of less than a hundred a year. Its lawyers were, with leisurely dignity and much profit, discussing cases more than a century old. But Goethe again wanted change, and was tired of Frankfort. In the month of May he went to see what interest he might find in Wetzlar.

He found much more interest than he had expected. It seemed that there was much more interest everywhere than in the "wretched hole," as he somewhere calls Frankfort, in which he had been born. Of the courts we need only say that he learned some practice of law and much disdain of it. It was the literary atmosphere of the place

## Goethe

that surprised him. Wetzlar was a small, dirty, unattractive town of about 5000 inhabitants. Its middle-class world was a world of government and legation officials and lawyers. He entered it with trepidation; he knew, too, that there was a dour great-aunt in the town keeping an eye on him.

No sooner did he sit at table in his hotel, however, than he found this official world bubbling with almost boyish fun. The company into which he had entered had formed themselves into a mock order of knights, and this was their Round Table. The Master sat at the head, the Chancellor at his side, the knights in order of the antiquity of their high-sounding titles. The ritual and forms were conducted with most amusing gravity. Into this secret society, which was the open joke of Wetzlar, Goethe was at once admitted, with the title of "Götz of Berlichingen, the Honest." They knew him from the *Gelehrten Anzeigen*, and he took a commanding place at once. Some of them were connected with another literary journal, *Boie's Almanack*, and Goethe joined and made the acquaintance of the Counts Stolberg (of whom more presently) and other insurgent young men.

When Goethe says, "What happened to me in Wetzlar was of no great importance," he clearly refers to his legal education. Something of very great importance—something that inspired his most beautiful work—happened to him in Wetzlar, although he was there less than four months. As he had done at Leipsic and Strassburg, he walked constantly into the surrounding country and became

## Charlotte Buff

familiar with it. In the village of Garbenheim, especially, he spent many hours of the summer days. He had found a pleasant shaded spot near the inn, and would lie on the grass, or have a table and his simple food brought out from the inn, and talk to the village children, who clustered round, and their mothers. The scene is beautifully described in *The Sorrows of Werther*. He is depicting the happy days he spent under the trees at Garbenheim, slowly shaping his dramatic ambition.

A quiet, sober legation-secretary named Kestner, eight years older than Goethe, has left an account of walking one day out to Garbenheim and seeing the young poet, lying on his back in his favourite spot, discussing problems of philosophy with three of the knights of the Round Table. He wrote at the time that this new-comer to Wetzlar was "a very remarkable man." Within a few weeks he was to realise this in a sense he had not anticipated. He was betrothed to Charlotte Buff, a daughter of the local steward of the ancient Teutonic Order. In the witty circle at the "Hotel of the Crown Princes" he was known as "the bridegroom." Goethe met his Charlotte, conceived a passionate love of her, and, without for a moment disputing the position of his friend Kestner, spent whole days in the most amorous enjoyment of her company.

The charm which Lotte, as she is commonly called, had for him can hardly be realised from a description of her. Lewes has misled many by making her sixteen years old, and observing that this was the "significant" age in the loves of

## Goethe

Goethe. That is a singularly unfortunate solution. Gretchen, we saw, was "a few years" older than Goethe; Kätchen Schökopf and Friederike Brion were nineteen; Lotte also had passed her nineteenth birthday when he met her. Antoinette Gerock and Maximiliane Brentano, whom Lewes instances, never kindled his passion. Lili Schönemann alone was in her seventeenth year when Goethe fell in love with her.<sup>1</sup> The attractiveness of Lotte, indeed, lay rather in her precocious womanhood. She was, like Friederike, a lithe, cheerful, blue-eyed blonde, uncultivated, of fine feelings and much good sense. She had perfect health and high spirits, but not beauty. Goethe dispassionately observes that she was "one of those who, while they do not inspire vehement passions, yet are of a nature to give a general feeling of pleasure." We shall see that she did inspire a passion which we can hardly hesitate to call "vehement." Yet her extant portrait, for all its sweet and delicate oval features, is not an adequate explanation.

It cannot be assumed that many now read *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, in which he makes a romance of his love of Lotte, but when we compare it with the autobiography and the extant letters we see that the charm of Lotte was not mainly due to the radiance of girlhood. It was in her pleasing blend of neat and graceful form, perfect health and serenity, joy in life, and wise and easy dis-

<sup>1</sup> Most of the figures and many details are inaccurate in Lewes at this point. Kestner was thirty, not twenty-four, and they had been betrothed for four, not two, years. She was born on January 13th, 1753.



CHARLOTTE BUFF

## Charlotte Buff

charge of her heavy domestic duties. Ten younger children and a large house were entrusted entirely to her. Goethe met her at a village dance at Whitsuntide, soon after his arrival. Her lover could not go until a late hour, and Goethe, taking a lady from the town in a coach, was requested to call at the "German House" for her. If we care to trust *Werther*, he first saw her, through the open doorway, cutting bread, in her dancing-dress, for the crowd of youngsters. It was the beginning of what he himself calls an idyll. Whatever impression she made on him in the coach, her vivacity and freshness in the dance so pleased him that he grasped the courtesy-right to visit her on the following day.

He was soon "attracted and enslaved," and found no pleasure apart from Lotte. It made no difference when he learned of her betrothal to Kestner. "Did I ever envy you the possession of Lotte in the human sense?" he afterwards wrote to Kestner. We have already understood his feeling. Love was a luxury given by the gods; enjoy it without thought of to-morrow. Tongues wagged in Wetzlar, however. Many different relations of men and women were known in sentimental Germany, but this was without precedent. While Kestner laboured diligently at the office, Goethe picked the beans with Lotte, told his wonderful stories to the children, and, with Lotte, "wandered through the ripe cornfields and raised up their hearts in the dewy morning." Kestner was there "when business permitted"; which was not frequently, except in

## Goethe

the evening. "Every day in the calendar ought to have been printed red." So the autobiography, from which Lewes strangely infers that Goethe had "forgotten what Lotte's smiles were like." Once only, in August, Goethe lost his control, and kissed her. She told Kestner, and punished the contrite poet with a few days' coldness and a moral lecture.

In August Goethe went to Giessen to see Merck, and they spent some merry days. He went in disguise to visit the famous professor of law, Höpfner, and then, with Schlosser and Merck, invited him to dinner. The grave jurist was amazed when the shabby unknown student of law, after imbibing much wine, made a long and bombastic speech, drank to the health of all good men and the perdition of bad ones, and sprang up and embraced him ardently. Schlosser and Merck thought it time to introduce Goethe, and they ended hilariously. Returning to Wetzlar he eagerly took Merck to see Lotte. We know from a letter to his wife that Merck appreciated her, but he was too wise to encourage. He affected a cold indifference, and pointed out to Goethe that the "Juno-like figure" of one of his disengaged friends was much finer than that of Lotte. He persuaded Goethe to accompany him on a tour down the Rhine. Goethe, at this point, calls him "Mephistopheles," and shows that he was angry.

Probably Councillor Goethe also pressed his departure, and he now felt that he must go. For a week or two he was unable to tear himself from Lotte. When his birthday came (August 28th), he

98

## Charlotte Buff

helped her in the preparations until midnight, and spent the whole birthday with her and the children. For another fortnight he hovered in misery about the "German House," and at length broke the golden chain. Kestner's diary gives us a dramatic picture of the end. On the evening of September 10th the three sat together and discussed the question of a future life: the question whether farewell meant eternal farewell. Goethe listened in agony. He was leaving, without telling them, early the next morning. When he rose to go, he kissed Lotte's hand, and murmured that they would meet again. "To-morrow, I suppose," she said, mocking a little. But on the morrow she read, with tears, a feverish note telling her that he had gone for ever.

A few days later we find him cordially enjoying himself in the house of a comfortable and cultivated family, overlooking a pretty valley that ran down to the Rhine. A short walking tour had restored his health, and the scenery almost intoxicated him. He suddenly wondered whether painting was not his vocation. He had at the moment a valuable pocket-knife in his hand, and he impulsively flung it, for an augury, among the trees by the river. If he saw it splash into the Rhine, he would be an artist. But he saw the splash without seeing the knife, and he pronounced the oracle ambiguous.

Merck had sent him on to the house of Privy Councillor Laroche, where he would join him in a few days. Laroche was a witty, sarcastic, sober official. His wife, a tall slender woman of delicate features and sentimental character, flushed with the



## Goethe

recent production of a novel, won Goethe's attachment; her eldest daughter inspired a warmer feeling. Maximiliane Laroche was then seventeen—Goethe wrongly says that they were “about the same age”: a pretty, supple, vivacious girl, with dark soft eyes and “a complexion of remarkable freshness and bloom.” It was not until she married, two years later, that Goethe fell more or less in love with her. Although he remarks, apropos of her, that “it is very pleasant when we feel a new passion stirring in us before the old one is quite extinct,” it merely means that he was particularly pleased to have the bright young girl fall to his share in their excursions. We shall see that there was no question whatever of the old passion nearing extinction.

The sentimental Leuchsenring arrived next, with his caskets of tender letters and painted ribands. Frau Laroche was enraptured. Her husband listened for a time, then left the room with the remark that he was “more convinced than ever that women wasted sealing-wax on their letters; they need only fasten them with a pin, and might be quite sure that nobody would open them.” The prophet had even ruder blows to bear when Merck presently arrived, with his family. In the larger company Goethe was better able to appropriate Maximiliane. Possibly Merck perceived it. At all events he pointed out to Goethe that the company was dangerously mixed, and said that they must depart before the harmony broke. He returned slowly up the Rhine in a yacht, with the Mercks, sketching the scenery. There were more maids at Frankfort.

## Charlotte Buff

Kestner was there before the end of September, and he describes how he went walking with Goethe and Merck. They met a young lady who lit up at the sight of Goethe and threw herself into his arms with warm kisses. It was Charlotte Gerock, sister of the pretty Antoinette whose name is, on slight grounds, associated closely with that of Goethe. It is known that she adored Goethe, and that he liked her and was much with her. But the belief that he had a more tender feeling for her rests, as we shall see, on a mistaken identification.

He seems to have travelled for a month or two before settling in Frankfort. On November 7th, in fact, he was back in Wetzlar with Schlosser, who had business there. For two days he again hovered about the old "German House," until his feelings threatened to burst the bonds he laid on them. A letter that he wrote to Kestner on the 10th betrays his condition. Kestner must forgive him for having omitted to say good-bye; Schlosser had prevented him from paying the final visit in which he intended to do so, and to claim one kiss from Lotte because it was to be his last visit. He had played a trick on Schlosser for this interference, but he adds: "It was certainly time I went. Last night, on the sofa, I had thoughts for which a man deserves to be hanged." He concludes: "God give you a whole life such as those two days were to me." A few days later he wrote to Frau Laroche that "it is the fate of noble souls vainly to seek a mirror of themselves."

In December he settled in Frankfort, and sought

## Goethe

to bury his passion under a heap of work. He re-wrote *Götz*, brooded over the idea of *Werther*, and contemplated again the many tragic shapes which haunted his artistic consciousness. During much of the day he transacted legal business. An uncle had succeeded his grandfather on the council, and this man obtained for him a number of unimportant tasks. Councillor Goethe looked on with increasing satisfaction. A dense veil had fallen between the father and the son, nor is there the least indication that the mother knew of the dark and bitter life he hid under his activity. While his father watched his little legal labours with complacency, he was, in the manuscript of *Götz*, making caustic reflections on juridical life in general, and that of Frankfort in particular. While the mother kindled over his playful attentions to Cornelia's friends, and prepared linen for the coming marriage, he was handling a dagger in bed or kissing the silhouette of Lotte that hung on the wall. He looked round on their world at Frankfort, in which they would imprison him for life, with wild thoughts. Cornelia was engaged to Schlosser, and would leave the town with him. Others of his best friends were going.

The year 1773 was, therefore, the worst in Goethe's life. How it must have darkened the colouring of the first part of *Faust*, which he then began to write! In his healthiest hours he had visions of a sunny world beckoning him to leave his books and come out into the streets and meadows. He went, time after time, and found

## Charlotte Buff

that the tempting things were Dead-Sea fruit. The approaching marriage of Charlotte and Kestner, especially, cast a deep shadow over his days. His letters to them in the first half of 1773 are extraordinary in their mixture of passion and melancholy resignation.

They were to be married in April, and until then Goethe worships the little silhouette on the wall of his bedroom. He enters his room in the dark, and chances to touch the piece of paper, and he must at once write to tell Kestner of the thrill it gave him. It shall be buried, he says, on her wedding day. He will make a "holy sepulchre" for it, and only restore it, with reverence, to the wall when he hears that Lotte is a mother. He is to be allowed to buy the wedding-ring—he insists and has to be humoured—and she must send him the bridal bouquet to wear. Then they suddenly write to say that they were married on Palm Sunday, a week before the appointed time, and his congratulation runs: "I wander in deserts where there is no water, my hair is my shade, my blood is my well . . . yet the sight of your barque in the harbour, with its gay bunting and its cheerful cries, rejoices me." A few days later he thinks that God must be "a very cold-blooded man." Weeks later he is walking to Darmstadt with the last faded flowers of the bouquet in his hat. "People think that the curse of Cain is on me," he says; and he begs for the blue-striped dressing-jacket, in which he had often seen Lotte, as a memento. The fire slowly sinks. It blazes out again when, in May 1774, he

## Goethe

learns that Lotte has a boy, and that his name is Wolfgang; and again, as we shall see, when they find the whole intimate story told to the world in *Werther*.

The sincerity of this remarkable passion and the profound dejection of Goethe are not lessened by a letter or two in which he reflects an occasional hour of buoyancy. They show only that, as we hardly need to be reminded, he was an impetuous and exquisitely sensitive man. Lewes, after quarrelling with the coldness of the autobiography, quarrels with the heat of the letters, and smiles at Goethe's statement that the thought of suicide oppressed him. Under the shadow of Lotte's approaching marriage, Lewes says, he writes to tell her of an excellent maiden who has fallen to him in a playful marriage lottery, and whom he "loves heartily." He speaks again in a later letter of his "maid," and will venture to call her his "dear little wife." He skates and jokes so merrily on the ice, dashing along in his mother's crimson cloak, that she claps her hands for joy. And, years afterwards, she told Maximiliane's daughter that this hilarity was due to the fact that her mother's dark eyes were looking on.

That Goethe had hours of pleasure in the course of 1773 no one would think of doubting. He was incapable of nursing a sorrow so consistently. We remember how he danced for nearly ten hours with Salomea Brion, and wrote next day to Salzmann that he was unhappy. So he now fenced and skated with Horn or young Schlosser, took moon-

## Charlotte Buff

light strolls with Antoinette Gerock and other young girls, and translated Homer for them. But most of the indications of enjoyment which some of his biographers quote are not in the least inconsistent with the statement, in the autobiography, that he was seriously depressed and thought of suicide. His friendliness with Maximiliane, after her marriage, falls in 1774, not 1773, and is quite irrelevant. He could skate merrily enough by that time. The walks with Antoinette Gerock and the "dear little wife" occur in January and February 1773, and are equally irrelevant. The dark time was the spring and summer and autumn of 1773. Antoinette Gerock was not alone in the pleasant moonlight walk he mentions in one of his letters; there were two maidens. It is now, moreover, fairly clear that the girl who fell to his share in the marriage lottery of 1773 was not Antoinette, but Susanne Magdalene Münch. I will return to this point later. These things were distractions in a period of moderate melancholy. To "love" and to "like" are, we must remember, expressed by the same word in German. The poverty of the language has added much to the volume of Goethe's amorousness. He merely says that he "liked the maid greatly," that he would choose her "*if* he had to marry," or "*if* we loved each other as you two [Kestner and Charlotte] do."

There is no doubt that for many months after the marriage of Charlotte he suffered a grievous depression, and thought constantly of suicide. He had at Wetzlar defended suicide in cases of irre-

## Goethe

mediable unhappiness. In October 1772 he had been wrongly informed that one of his Wetzlar friends had ended his life, and had replied that he "respected the act." A little later, as we shall see, one of the Wetzlar group did commit suicide, and this became the central point of *Werther*. In this novel, at which he worked throughout 1773, he was making himself commit suicide on account of his hopeless passion for Lotte. But it is needless to multiply proof. The weariness of life which he betrays in many letters, the repulsive prospect which his father sternly held before him, and the fact that he had no religious scruples to restrain him, make the thought of suicide inevitable. When Fräulein von Roussillon died prematurely, to his great grief, in the spring of 1773, when the Kestners removed to distant Hanover, when Caroline Flachsland was married and taken away by Herder, and when Merck was compelled to go to St. Petersburg, the world was darkened. This dispersion occurred in April and May. And as Cornelia was to marry and vanish from his world in November, he moodily reflected that there was little to detain him.

We need not think that he came very close to ending his life, but he brooded over the idea and studied methods. Most splendid seemed to him that of Emperor Otto, who, after genially entertaining his friends, retired to plunge a dagger in his heart. In his collection of old weapons Goethe had such a dagger. He placed it in his bed, night by night, and wondered if he had the courage to thrust it an inch or two into his breast. He had

## Charlotte Buff

not, and, disdaining less brave methods, he "laughed himself out of his suicidal ideas and all his hypochondriacal feelings." He chose the alternative of killing his morbid passion by making a book of it, and returned to the writing of *Werther*. This incident seems, from its position in the autobiography, to have occurred in the latter part of 1773, after the departure of Cornelia. His worst moods were over by the end of the year.

Goethe does not represent in his autobiography that he attempted to commit suicide and failed. He suggests rather that, as the constant thought of suicide pressed on him in his long hours of melancholy, he convinced himself, by handling a sharp dagger and putting its point to his breast, that life still held things dear enough and promise rich enough to restrain him from passing through its gate into the darkness from which there would be no return. In a placid, pleasant way he loved the bright maidens who had grown up with Cornelia; nature was as glorious as ever; the future was faintly lit with hope, for he had published *Götz*, and ringing messages of encouragement were coming to him. He shook off his despondency, and returned to life.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE TRIUMPH OF YOUTH

I HAVE already observed that something in Goethe responded to the two apparently contradictory interpretations which men and women were then putting upon the naturist gospel of Rousseau: the robust joy in nature of some, and the culture of delicate sentiments in others. The two tendencies are not really contradictory. Delicacy is as much a part of nature as robust vigour. But they are as a rule so sharply distributed in different persons that they present to us two hostile and mutually disdainful schools. The one flings the censure of "mawkish sentimentality"; the other retorts with a heavy charge of "animalism." In the rich personality of Goethe they were united in full development. Of the one he gave a superb expression in *Götz*; of the other a supreme illustration in *Werther*. And he was writing *Werther* at the time when he was publishing *Götz*.

The dramatised story of *Götz of Berlichingen* was published in the summer of 1773. We saw that he wrote it toward the end of 1771, and re-wrote it toward the close of the following year, with considerable improvement. He had, however, no intention to publish it, and it was assuredly not written

## The Triumph of Youth

for the stage. Merck, seeing him loiter over his manuscript, curtly bade him publish it. Goethe doubted if he could find a publisher, and Merck, who was an excellent business man, proposed that they should undertake it themselves. Goethe bought the paper, Merck found a printer, and in a month or two the book was before the world. It at once commanded so much attention that a pirated edition appeared, and it became the theme of the literary world. It was not adapted for the stage until nearly thirty years later, but, such as it was, it was played at Berlin in 1774, and aroused great enthusiasm. Men talked of a German Shakespeare, a prophet of the *Sturm und Drang* spirit, a deliverer from the bondage of France.

The play is the chief embodiment of what we should now call Goethe's Nietzschean strain. It was, within limits, a glorification of lawless strength; just as *Werther* is a glorification of lawless weakness. Godfrey of Berlichingen had been a vigorous, chivalrous, fine-hearted knight, but something of a freebooter and a rebel. The play took a page of strong ill-regulated German life from the sixteenth century and made it live again. It served excellently to incorporate all the qualities which Goethe had admired in Shakespeare, Homer, Æschylus, and Ossian: strength, depth, sincerity, naturalness. As a piece of literary work it had very high dramatic qualities, exaggerated virtues.<sup>1</sup> But the comparison

<sup>1</sup> Goethe does not say, as some represent, that the Elizabeth of his play is his mother; he says that "she believed she was Elizabeth."

## Goethe

with Shakespeare is quite misplaced. The gifts of the two poets differed as much as their ages differed. Shakespeare wrote in no *Sturm und Drang* period, but in the joyous springtime of a great nation, when peace and prosperity sent a stream of rich blood through its veins. And the quality of imagination is wholly different. There is in *Götz* little or no humour, and there is none of that exquisite and spontaneous imagery which gives Shakespeare a unique place among the poets of the world.

The publication of *Götz* was one of the influences which fought the dark shades that gathered about Goethe. It gave him an interest and a renewed hope of reaching the city of his dreams. Unfortunately, the praise was tempered by severe criticisms, especially from those whose judgment he valued. Perhaps it moved him little that Frederick II, who might have encouraged the nationalist spirit of it, was too wedded to French taste to appreciate it. But Lessing, whose *Laocoon* had cast the first rays of light on the path to this new world, refused to applaud; the work seemed to him to substitute lawlessness of spirit for spirit-less laws. Worst of all, Herder was "unkind and severe." Herder sought a golden mean. He resented the "dedication to Psyche" of his betrothed and her sentimental friends, and he resented *Götz*, or certain features of it. His character again led him into error. Had he told Goethe, as he told his wife, that the play contained "an uncommon amount of German strength, depth, and truth," he might have profitably criticised its errors and excesses. But he sent to Goethe only

## The Triumph of Youth

severe and satirical comments, and they were estranged for a year or two. There is very strong reason to think that in his poem "Satyros, or the deified Devil of the Forest," Goethe is caricaturing Herder, who in some respects held exaggerated naturist views. Leuchsenring, the sentimentalist, had had some revenge for their criticisms. He had sown discord in Darmstadt.

One by one Goethe's friends went from him. Merck had, in May, accompanied the Landgravine to St. Petersburg. Cornelia married on November 1st, and a fortnight later went with Schlosser to settle at Karlsruhe. About this time Goethe must have touched his lowest depth. No doubt he still saw Horn and the younger Schlosser and their girlfriends, but he lived, on the whole, a self-centred and melancholy life, and incarnated his sorrows in *Werther* and his bitterness in the growing theme of *Faust*. Just at that time, however, Johanna Fahlmer, a relative of his mother, came to live at Frankfort. She was only five years older than Goethe, but her own experience of deep suffering and her gentle sympathetic temper fitted her to win his confidence. She almost replaced Cornelia. In December, too, he heard that Maximiliane Laroche was about to marry and to live in Frankfort, and the dark year ended in a dawn.

Maximiliane, with whom, it will be remembered, he had spent many happy days on the banks of the Rhine after he had torn himself from Lotte, was a small and graceful young woman, with very dark eyes and a beautifully fresh complexion, in her nine-

## Goethe

teenth year. He would look forward to her arrival. Her mother and she had visited Frankfort in the summer, and strengthened his attachment to them. When it further transpired that she was not happy in her marriage, Goethe's feeling assumed a more tender, though never a passionate, complexion. She had married, early in January (1774), a wealthy widower with five children, Peter Anton Brentano, who was much older than she. The change from the lovely Rhine valley to the house of an Italian warehouseman in prosy Frankfort—from a highly cultivated and sensitive mother to a middle-aged dealer in herrings and cheese—gave her an attractive melancholy. Absolutely indifferent, as usual, to the chatter of observers or the feelings of the husband, Goethe entered with spirit and industry on the task of consoling her. They resumed, he says, their earlier relation of "brother and sister." It is probably true that his feeling might be described as warmly fraternal.

Merck, who had now returned, was an interested observer. Goethe, he writes to his wife, is helping the pretty young wife to amuse the children, playing to her accompaniment, and, generally, consoling her for "the smell of oil and cheese and the manners of her husband." His own buoyancy returned with his efforts to cheer her. It was at this time that the incident occurred which Frau Goethe told long afterwards to Maximiliane's daughter. Wolf borrowed her crimson fur-lined cloak, with golden clasps, and sped over the ice "like an arrow." "Your mother was on the ice," she said to Bettina. But

## The Triumph of Youth

Brentano soon grew intolerant of this brotherly kindness. How unreasonable these Brentanos and Kestners were, to be sure! He quarrelled with his wife; she appealed to Goethe; and Goethe admits that he "made matters worse with his spirited participation." In a very short time he found himself once more cut off from a "mirror of his soul."

The fresh anger and pain gave further emotional fuel for his romance. He fiercely separated himself from the world, and after four weeks came out of his retirement with the completed manuscript of his greatest work, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. In it are compressed all the seething emotions through which he had passed in the preceding eighteen months, since the height of his passion for Charlotte. But the strange duplicate of himself, into whose heart he puts his own emotions, takes us back for a moment to Wetzlar.

On the fringe of the merry group in which Goethe had moved at Wetzlar was a youth named Jerusalem, who looked on their games with gentle and silent melancholy: like some dark shade that haunts the pleasures it can no longer enjoy. He was a secretary at the Brunswick Legation, a quiet, artistic, cultivated youth. But he passionately loved the wife of a friend, and the hopeless love overshadowed his life. A month or two after Goethe had left Wetzlar, he heard that Jerusalem had borrowed his friend's pistols and shot himself. The story moved him very deeply. He remembered well the handsome youth, with soft blue eyes, dressed in an English costume of blue frock-coat and buff vest

## Goethe

and breeches. As he reflected on the story, and imagined Jerusalem's emotions, he felt how closely analogous they were to his own. He decided to blend the two in the imaginary hero of a drama or novel.

The account of the origin of *Werther* that he gives in the autobiography is not inaccurate. When the news of Jerusalem's death reached him he conceived the story and planned at least the earlier part of it. *Werther*, a blend of Jerusalem and Goethe, was to love Lotte—he would boldly name her in the story—and, after a poignant contemplation of her married life with Albert (Kestner), commit suicide. He thought first of a drama, then of an epistolary novel, such as Richardson and Rousseau had written. All through the year 1773 he was occupied with it, irregularly. Toward the close of the year he passed through his own darkest hours; in February he ended his intimacy with Maximiliane, suffered a fresh storm of emotion, and retired to his study to re-write and complete the work. It is interesting to learn that this great work was almost stillborn. He read the manuscript to Merck, who had returned from St. Petersburg in December. Merck listened without a sign of emotion, and Goethe, in great disappointment, was for a moment disposed to burn the manuscript. He only learned afterwards that Merck was preoccupied with grave troubles, and had hardly listened to him.

It was fortunate that Goethe did not on this occasion obey his impulse. It is acknowledged that *Werther* is his greatest work, and one of the greatest

## The Triumph of Youth

works, if not the greatest work, of its kind. In recent times—in England, at least—it is not unusual to smile indulgently at its exotic sentimentality, and speak of “Wertherism” as a phase which Goethe outgrew. He outgrew it in the sense that he never again equalled the book, and that he regretted some of the results of its publication. To speak of it as a phase is misleading, since, as I showed, *Götz* and *Werther* lived side by side in his brain. Nay, one may even say that it is just as true and sincere and natural as *Götz*. The pervading melancholy, the tense and fine-drawn sentiment, are the outcome of a realistic effort to portray a mind brooding, even to suicide, under the shadow of a fierce and hopeless passion. It did not embody a philosophy of life which was peculiar to Goethe at that period. The change that occurred later was that he thought it inadvisable to choose such a subject, and would not have had the colours on his palette to paint it if he had chosen it.

Of the beauty of the work it is needless to speak. It at once placed Goethe in the first rank of German writers; many would then have said, before the front rank. Young men, just cultivating vigour on the model of *Götz of the Iron Hand*, were puzzled by this new gospel of the inner and emotional life. Some resisted, the majority assented; and the blue frock-coat and buff vest and breeches became fashionable. Goethe, after a time, adopted the costume himself. Women readers were enraptured, but it is not a “women’s work.” Napoleon read it repeatedly. Carlyle later wrote an eloquent defence



## Goethe

of it. They saw truth where so many see only the hollow, if brilliant, wordiness against which Goethe had rebelled. It may be inadvisable to depict such rare emotions, but the description was artistically true. And even those who would omit the poignant utterances of passion will admire the beautiful descriptions of nature and the simple, graceful flow of the narrative.

Two people, above all others, were interested in *Werther*. He sent a copy to Herr and Frau Kestner in distant Hanover, and they were angry. Little details had been borrowed from many women to insert in the portrait of the heroine, but it was Lotte in the flesh from the first moment of Jerusalem taking her to the village ball. Goethe had, moreover, not only described, but exaggerated, the exceptional relation to them in which Lotte and Kestner had permitted him to be. The Lotte of *Werther* permitted, or suffered, much more than Lotte Buff had done. The Albert of *Werther* was not a flattering portrait of Kestner, who bitterly resented that such a "fool" and "miserable creature" should have been put in his position. Goethe expressed great sorrow. The personal complaint of Kestner he ignored—I fancy he would have denied that it was a caricature—and to Lotte he sent the message that to have one's name murmured with reverence by thousands of lips should not be an affliction. They forgave him, but his correspondence with them almost ceased from that time.

Although the work was finished in February, and was not published until the autumn, Goethe re-

## The Triumph of Youth

turned at once to healthy sentiments. The "general confession" had relieved him; the ghosts and imps were swept out of his imagination. He had grown accustomed to transferring his stresses of emotion to paper. In the case of such a work as *Werther* a great deal of construction was needed, and we find many writers expressing scepticism in regard to Goethe's statement that he wrote it in four weeks. When we reflect that he had brooded over the plan for more than a year and had already written much of it, it is not in the least improbable that he wrote the whole romance, as we have it, in four weeks of intense solitary labour.<sup>1</sup> He tells us something of his method of creation, and we can understand that he might write easily when the moment for writing came. No poet ever observed more scrupulously than he the Horatian maxim: "File your verses twice before they reach your tongue." He would make himself so familiar with his characters, and give them so definite a body in his imagination, that he could make them sit on the chairs in his room and talk to him or to each other.

After the completion of *Werther*, in February or March 1774, he returned, in the dawning spring, to an enjoyment of life. It was to be a golden year. The spring was passed in the company of the young women and young men who had gathered about

<sup>1</sup> I may observe that many very conscientious artists find it an extremely moderate and leisurely practice to write a thousand words a day. Such was the practice of Zola, and is of my friend Mr. Eden Phillpotts. On that scale, without unusual concentration, *Werther* would be written in a month. We shall find that his superb poem, *Hermann and Dorothea*, was written just as quickly.

## Goethe

Cornelia, and maintained their merry circle after her departure. Then occurred the marriage lottery which gave him a "little wife." Some years before these youths and maidens had discovered a novel way of pairing for the entertainments and excursions of the week. They were mated weekly by the cast of dice, and the pairs had to regard each other as lovers for the rest of the week. In 1773 they changed the game. They were, Goethe says, quite familiar with the behaviour of lovers; in future the mated pair must behave toward each other with the cold and ceremonious politeness of husband and wife. In this way Goethe obtained his "dear little wife" in the early part of 1773. But in the autobiography Goethe says that a certain maid fell to him three times in succession, so that the company decreed that the union must be permanent, and he clearly places this in the spring of 1774.

It seems possible to disentangle the confusion which we find in his biographers on this point. An early writer, Duentzer, made inquiries in Frankfort in regard to this unnamed maiden, and learned that she was Anna Sibylla Münch, the sixteen-year-old daughter of a comfortable merchant of the town. Others pointed out, however, that in a letter to Kestner Goethe said that his "maid" was born on January 11th,<sup>1</sup> and that was not the birthday of Anna Sibylla. The extreme friendliness for Antoinette Gerock seemed to point rather to her. But it appears that Anna Sibylla had an elder sister,

<sup>1</sup> He is mistaken in taking this to be Lotte's birthday, which was January 13th

## The Triumph of Youth

Susanne Magdalene, whose birthday fell on January 11th, and it can hardly be doubted that she was the "dear little wife" of 1773. Duentzer's inquiries make it highly probable that it was the younger sister who fell to him three times in 1774, and was regarded as his permanent mate. It must be borne in mind that, according to the rules, he was *not* to make love to her, but to behave on the conjugal standard. She had a pretty face, a good figure, an even and cheerful temper. She seems to have been not devoid of wit. At one of the evening meetings of the group Goethe read aloud a romantic narrative, in which Beaumarchais told how he had compelled a Spanish writer, Clavijo, to make amends to his ill-treated sister. When he had finished reading, Anna said: "If I were thy lover instead of thy wife, I should ask thee to make a play of that story." Goethe had already noticed its dramatic quality, and "in order to prove that a lover and a wife might be united in one person," he promised that the play should be ready on that day week. This was the origin of his tragedy *Clavijo*, a slight but well-finished play. The heroine is based on Friederike.

He continued for some months to pay these dispassionate marital attentions to his little wife, and the mothers of the two began to take interest. Frau Goethe found that Anna Sibylla showed great promise of domestic quality, and concluded that she would be an excellent anchor for the roving barque. Goethe presently observed that changes were being made in the house. The suite of rooms which were marked out for him and his wife were receiving attention;

## Goethe

the linen-cupboards were much visited. One day he surprised his mother in a kind of lumber-room, where the discarded cradles of several generations were stored. She was fondly contemplating a large walnut cradle, inlaid with ebony. It was the mother who blushed. Goethe merely observed, disinterestedly, that these heavy things were out of fashion; a nice light basket, slung over the shoulder, was much more healthy. With that observation the third part of the autobiography closes, and little Anna Münch passes from the chronicle. It would be thirty years before Goethe would marry, and he would then marry the last type of woman who could occur to his mother's imagination.

Meantime, in 1774, larger figures had entered into his life, driving even farther from his mind the idea of a humdrum conjugal life at Frankfort. His works were winning recognition. The first visitor of distinction was Lavater, the famous preacher and physiognomist. They had corresponded for some time, and Lavater greatly esteemed two small works on religious questions which Goethe had published in 1773. He begged a portrait, and Goethe playfully sent him the portrait of Bahrtdt, a Giessen professor who was particularly hostile to the new ideas. Lavater was not deceived, but he was, none the less, much astonished when he at last visited Frankfort and saw Goethe. He stayed for some time in the Goethe house, in the early summer, to the great pride of Frau Goethe and the envy of her pious friends. When the ladies even pressed to see the bedroom of the prophet, Merck observed

## The Triumph of Youth

that "the pious souls wished to see where the body of the Lord was laid." Goethe deeply respected the gentle, spiritual man, with tall stooping form. He, however, differed radically from him on religion, and preferred to pit Fräulein von Klettenberg against him, and study the clash of the two mysticisms. Lavater was on his way to take the waters at Ems, and Goethe accompanied him.

He had hardly returned to Frankfort when another distinguished visitor, the educational reformer Basedow, arrived and was entertained. The contrast was piquant. Lavater, though only eight years older than Goethe, was a lean, clear-skinned, quiet clergyman, of suave and refined ways. Basedow represented the body, in its conventional opposition to the spirit. He was an ugly, dirty, dark, and boisterous man, with small black beady eyes under bushy ridges, fond of beer and strong tobacco, arrogant and blustering. He was an original thinker, and had a great, if not wholly flattering, reputation. He was much regarded at Frankfort, but the Goethes began to find the distinction of their son irksome. Basedow seasoned the meals with fiery denunciation of received ideas in regard to religion and education, and filled the house with empty bottles, and abominable smoke, and the fumes of a certain peculiar tinder, which Goethe proposed to introduce into natural history as the "Stink-sponge."

Goethe left his law-business to the care of his impatient father, and took Basedow to Ems. There he not only flung the materialist against the mystic,

## Goethe

but entered frankly into the gaieties of the place. He found many old friends there, and they recalled student days. Once he disguised himself as a rural clergyman, a friend taking the part of his wife, and they bored and enraged the pleasure-seekers at the baths. At no time do we perceive so clearly the breadth and versatility of Goethe's nature as during his travels in 1774. In the interval of the dances he would go and discuss some grave question with Basedow. The educationist sat in a room above the pleasure-hall, dictating to his secretary in a cloud of smoke and tinder-fumes. From his partner's arms Goethe would run upstairs to fire a problem at Basedow, and then hurry down for the next dance. The three lions then set out to travel together, visiting many noble and cultivated dames who brought society to inspect them.

It would be difficult to imagine a more singular trio than the deeply religious and refined Lavater, the deeply irreligious and blunt Basedow, and the brilliant young writer, in gay holiday clothes, who walked between them. When Basedow carried his freethought too far Goethe humorously punished him. He did not dislike the man's fierce thrusts at received opinions, but he saw that Basedow was injuring his more serious propaganda. They were driving together one hot day, and Basedow, smoking heavily, became very thirsty. They at last reached an inn, but Goethe told the coachman to drive on. Basedow huskily protested, then stormed and swore. Goethe then explained that he had noticed that the bottles in the inn bore two triangles. If one

## The Triumph of Youth

triangle, being a symbol of the Trinity, so much annoyed Basedow, how could they go with him to face two?

They travelled down the Rhine together, and Goethe wrote much doggerel, and some fine poems, as occasion arose. He was in his sunniest mood, and he tells us that he almost outdid Basedow in reckless behaviour. In one of his poems, "A Dinner at Coblenz," he gives a little picture of the journey. As they sat at dinner Lavater was discussing the "Revelation of St. John" with a country clergyman on one side of him; Basedow, on the other, was fiercely impressing on a stubborn professor of dancing that baptism was an antiquated and ridiculous custom. Mephistopheles, between them, was genially composing his poem. His route might have been traced some time afterwards by poems or epigrams in ladies' albums. One of them, he remembered, ran :

"We went, as if to Emmaus,  
Striding in fiery temper;  
On either side a prophet great,  
The world-child in the centre."

Yet each of the two was attracted to Goethe. Lavater, the fervent divine, pronounced him a genius without equal, and entered into a lasting and most intimate friendship with him. Basedow, the lurid freethinker and almost boorish egoist, was equally satisfied with his side of "the world-child." It is significant, however, that it was the friendship with Lavater which deepened and endured—until he discovered Lavater's hidden weakness.



## Goethe

When the quaint society broke up, Goethe went to Düsseldorf. The brothers Jacobi, whom he visited, represented a third contrasting type, yet were just as easily won. They were mystical, sentimental, profoundly religious poets. For some time they had been estranged from Goethe, who had written rather disdainfully of their "good heart." Johanna Fahlmer, who secretly loved Fritz Jacobi, reconciled them. Into their sober household Goethe entered, fresh from his boisterous journey down the Rhine, in rakish costume, with a few withered flowers in his hat. After a few conversations he was pronounced by Fritz Jacobi "an extraordinary creature of God"—in a complimentary sense—and was admitted to warm friendship. His charm of person and versatility of mind won the affection of all whom he met. With the Jacobis he shared a deep reverence for Spinoza, the philosopher in whom he had long recognised the finest exponent of his own creed. But he did not merely talk philosophy and religion out of courtesy. Fritz Jacobi was the first man whom he suffered to gaze into the dark "chaos," as he calls it, of his inner life.

And from this atmosphere of piety and asceticism we find him passing quickly to fresh gaiety. He goes to Elberfeld, where his Strassburg friend Jung (Stilling) has a medical practice. He takes to bed, and summons Dr. Jung. As the serious young doctor puzzles over the form buried in the bed-clothes, it suddenly leaps up and flings its arms round his neck. They ended the day in stormy conviviality; and from Elberfeld Goethe returned

## The Triumph of Youth

to discuss the gravest problems of religion with the Jacobis, and a few days later was once more enjoying himself in the bath-rooms at Ems.

He had more distinguished visitors when he returned to Frankfort in the middle of August. One was the poet Klopstock, for whom he had still great regard, but—it reads strangely in the autobiography after the account of his journey—Klopstock greatly disappointed him by refusing to discuss anything more serious than skating. Others whose names are now of little interest called. The honouring procession was crowned in December, when a tall friendly visitor, of military bearing, announced himself as Captain von Knebel, attendant upon the young Dukes of Saxe-Weimar. Goethe called to see them, and the first link was forged of the chain which was to bind him for the last decades of his life to Weimar. Karl August invited him to follow them to Mainz, and the mutual liking was strengthened.

The recognition of genius which was implied in this series of visits ended Goethe's uncertainty. He was, we must remember, only in his twenty-fifth year of life, yet was saluted by competent judges as one of the first writers of Germany. *Werther* was not published until after his twenty-fifth birthday, or in October (1774), but its success was immediate. There were censures and parodies, but Goethe was broadly recognised as a poetic genius—it is non-metrical poetry—in the early months of his twenty-sixth year. He was not spoiled, though he seems to have flung some veiled irony at the older

## Goethe

gods who did not warmly welcome him to Olympus. We saw that he wrote a heavy satire on some man whom we may confidently recognise as Herder. Klopstock is believed to be the victim of his less offensive "Ode an Schwager Chronos." Wieland he openly assailed in his "Götter, Helden, und Wieland," though this was a fair, if somewhat pert, criticism of a literary manner. Wieland overlooked the touch of insolence in it, and became an outspoken and most generous admirer of Goethe. Apart from these indiscretions, he bore his early honours with grace, and addressed himself to the task of embodying the other vague shapes which lingered in his artistic consciousness.

There were five great ideas competing for his attention. The design of writing a new *Cæsar* he abandoned altogether. Bielschowsky suggests that at the time his sympathy would have been with the democratic assassins, and the age was not prepared for such a work. Of *Faust* he had already written several scenes, as we shall see later. *Mohammed* and *Prometheus* also had begun to take shape on paper, but they remain superb fragments in the gallery of his creations. Lastly, he has left us a sketch of a large work called *The Wandering Jew*, which never passed beyond that stage. He stood, in 1774, like a mountaineer wavering in the valley between several alluring hills.

Unfortunately, the circumstances were not favourable to great work. The atmosphere of the home was again troubled. The train of visitors had annoyed his father and wearied his mother. Frau

## The Triumph of Youth

Goethe may have been flattered when 'ducal visitors came, but her husband coldly observed that "if you keep away from Jupiter, you keep away from the lightning." It was only under pressure from Fräulein von Klettenberg that he consented to his son's visit to Mainz, and she died while he was away. It is clear that Councillor Goethe was seriously angry. What compensation was there in the production of a romance for the ruin of a stately and promising program of life? Every year of delay made the future darker. The law business in Frankfort was scandalously neglected; the literary business was so poor that, even in the full tide of the success of *Werther*, the most handsome offer that Wolf received for a play was thirty *thalers* (about four pounds). He earned nothing, and his debts increased. Beggars and adventurers wheedled coin out of him by admiring *Werther*, or threatening to carry out its gospel. He had not yet paid for the paper on which *Götz* had been printed. Councillor Goethe gave him his monthly allowance of six florins (less than a pound) and then buttoned his pockets. He regarded the author of *Götz* and *Werther* as a sturdy beggar.

So from the last grey days of 1775 Goethe still looked with troubled gaze into the future. In one sense his condition had become more painful. The path to the city of his dreams was now clear enough, but there were tax-gatherers by the way and earthly needs to be met. His heart, too, was empty. No crimson glow of passion touched the drab surroundings. He was reconciled with the Brentanos, but

## Goethe

on a footing of bourgeois sobriety. The Gerocks and Münchs could inspire no passion. He walked heavily through life until, with the breaking of the new year, a radiant young figure once more entered his mind, and the lamp of love poured its light over his difficulties.

## CHAPTER VII

LILI SCHÖNEMANN

WHEN Goethe looked back from the tranquillity of advancing age upon the many women who had gladdened his youth and early manhood, he declared that the only one of them whom he had "truly loved" was Lili Schöнемann. His assurance may, after our examination of his passion for Lotte, excite a large expectation, but we must in this instance dispute the justice of his recollection. Passion after passion had flamed and died in his soul during half a century, and, to enable him to judge their relative vehemence, he had only the pale and cold shades that lingered in his memory. We are more fortunate; we have the letters in which the fire of the living passion is eternally reflected. And when we read these, we may or may not grant that the deep and steadfast feeling which he calls true love was bestowed on Kätschen Schöнкopf, or Friederike Brion, or the woman whom he eventually married, but it was assuredly given to Lotte Buff and, in a later year, to Charlotte von Stein. Perhaps we should hold that he loved these two more deeply than he loved Anna Elizabeth Schöнемann.

Yet the beautiful, accomplished girl of sixteen undoubtedly inspired in him, and felt for him, a

## Goethe

passionate affection. Lewes is alone among serious writers in representing her as a frivolous coquette,<sup>1</sup> and thinking that Goethe was merely ensnared by "the merciless grace of maidenhood." It was, once more, not the mere daintiness of a beautiful girl in her teens that attracted Goethe, but the union of this fresh and delicate beauty with an intelligence and sentiment beyond her years. He loved her deeply, thought seriously of marrying her, and was only separated from her by external circumstances that it was wise and just to consider.

On January 1st, 1775, he went with a friend to a musical party at the house of Frau Schönemann, the wealthy widow of one of the chief bankers of Frankfort. Lili was playing the piano when he entered the room, and he walked to the instrument and stood gazing at her. She had a patrician beauty that is not suggested in the descriptions or portraits of his earlier loves. Her face, with large dark blue eyes and full smiling lips and finely shaped nose, fell in a perfect oval line from the broad and high forehead to the pointed chin. Her skin was remarkably clear, and her head, crowned with a mass of blonde hair, was poised, in excellent proportion, over graceful shoulders and rounded bust. She played with great skill and feeling, for a girl in her seventeenth year. Goethe spoke a few words to her when she had finished, and again later in the evening. When, at the close, the mother pressed

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Reeks (*The Mother of Goethe*) lightly speaks of Lili as "a giddy coquette," but this part of her work is full of inaccuracies.

## Lili Schönemann

him to come again, and Lili supported her, he gladly consented; though they belonged to a narrow social circle, higher than that of his father or mother, which he rarely entered.<sup>1</sup> The father had died twelve years before, but they were rich and connected with other wealthy families. Lili was the only daughter, and had been carefully instructed.

Goethe waited a few days, from conventional feeling, before calling again, and then made frequent visits. Before many weeks he was admittedly in love, and Lili welcomed so brilliant a lover. It is singular that what Goethe repeatedly calls her childlike candour has been made the ground of a charge of conscious coquetry. As Goethe soon saw, men pressed round the beautiful heiress, and many a girl of sixteen would have been spoiled by her position. She artlessly confessed that she had been pleased to attract some of them, and that she had deliberately tried to win Goethe. That is a slender basis for the charge that she frivolously "ensnared his roving heart through the lures of passionate desire." Goethe says that her character was equal to her beauty, and we shall see that the young girl was capable of unselfish devotion.

But from the outset Goethe's love of her was assailed by a feeling of repugnance for her surroundings. It is the story of Friederike again, at the other end of the social scale. During his first

<sup>1</sup> Some biographers exaggerate the wealth of Councillor Goethe. His account books show that his expenditure was between three and four hundred pounds a year.



## Goethe

visit he had eyes only for Lili, and the next calls were made in quiet domestic hours, when Lili, always simply dressed, spoke to him in naive confidence of her feelings and her world, as Friederike had done. Then there were further social evenings, and he saw her, richly decorated, surrounded by men and women of a social type which he, the lover of nature, detested, and who regarded with disdain the licence of a literary man. To be present at all, and catch the occasional warm glance from her, he had to abandon his comfortable grey frock-coat and brown silk neckerchief and unconventional manners.

His discomfort is told to the young Countess Augusta von Stolberg, who enters his life just at the same time as Lili. His intimacy with Augusta von Stolberg is one of those puzzling episodes which, perhaps, throw more light on his character than the clearest actions. In *Werther* he imagines his friend pointing out to him, as most men would, that his passion for Lotte was "either" one thing, "or" another. He replies :

"In real life there is very little of this 'either or'; our sentiments and actions have as infinite a variety of shades as there are between a Roman and a snub nose."

Countess Stolberg was the daughter of a deceased Court Marshal of the King of Denmark, and sister of the Counts Stolberg who will fill a page or two of this chapter. After reading *Werther* she had written an anonymous letter to Goethe, and it

## Lili Schönemann

touched him so much that they entered into a frequent correspondence. In January he addresses her as "My dear," in February he "loves" her and kisses her hand in spirit, in March she is "Dear Augusta" and "My sister." By the middle of the summer, when he is the acknowledged lover of Lili, the young countess is addressed as "Gustgen" and "My heart." She was, during that year, his most intimate confidante, yet they never saw each other. Goethe's love was as comprehensive and many-toned as his intellectual nature. For him at least there was no "either or."

It is in the letters to Augusta von Stolberg that we read the true course of his love of Lili. As early as February he betrays that her surroundings repel him. He draws two pictures of himself; in one he is a smartly and stiffly dressed unit in an ordinary drawing-room crowd, in the other an easy-going artist in soft and unconventional garments. But a pair of large soft blue eyes draw him over and over again to the brilliantly lit drawing-room and its hated crowd. The poems (included in his autobiography) which he wrote at the time show the struggle and restlessness. It is hardly necessary to say, as Heinemann does, that a concern for his liberty fights against his love, or, as Bielschowsky does, that he fears the stunting of his genius in married life. Simply, as in the case of Friederike, the frame of the picture repels him. At Sesenheim it was a crowd of tactless, rough country cousins; at Frankfort it is a crowd of youths whose supreme ideal is correctness of dress and manner.

## Goethe

In the spring, however, these shades were driven off, and his love deepened. Lili went to live with her uncle Bernard at Offenbach, a cluster of villas lower down the river—the Twickenham of Frankfurt, in a word. The warmer season and the large gardens and terraces gave more opportunity to lovers. Goethe had taken a room there in the house of a musician, Johann André, who thought Lili an enchanting player. His feeling now became so deep, and was so deliberately recognised by himself, that he wrote to Herder in March: "It looks as if the separate threads on which my destiny hangs are about to unite." Unfortunately, the narrative in the autobiography is at this point not only scanty but unreliable. For the first time (apart from one incident at Sesenheim) we can recognise some large, though not important, incidents as fiction, and the order of events is wrong.

He gives us a long, elaborate, and most entertaining account of how they celebrated Lili's seventeenth birthday on June 23rd. We shall see that he was hundreds of miles away, in Switzerland, at that date. He himself observes, at a later stage, that he had been in Switzerland a considerable time by July 16th. He then tells of walks with Lili on the summer evenings, which so exalt him that he spends the night in a vineyard. His legal work increases, and he is less frequently at Offenbach. At last a certain Demoiselle Delf puts an end to his indecision by forcing him into a kind of moral betrothal to Lili. Afterwards, he says,

## Lili Schönemann

the young Counts Stolberg came to Frankfort, and induced him to go with them to Switzerland.

There is much confusion and some "poetry" in this narrative. It was at the Easter fair, in the middle of April, that Dorothea Delf came to Frankfort. She was an old friend of the Schönmanns, an energetic little business woman from Heidelberg. We shall see that she liked Goethe, and thought she was doing a service to both in pressing the marriage with Lili. Securing some kind of consent from their parents—there was reluctance on both sides—she came upon the lovers and curtly bade them stand up and join hands. They did so and, says Goethe, "sighed and fell into each other's arms in great agitation."

It was not a betrothal, of course, but it focused Goethe's vague thoughts on marriage, and a struggle began in his mind. That he sincerely loved Lili, and that she would have made an excellent wife in her personal qualities, is doubted by no one but Lewes. The German biographers usually make him shrink from the marriage bond. I cannot see that such a marriage would have fettered his genius, or that he had any such concern. It is enough that Lili's world repelled him, or gave him serious anxiety. He could not but hesitate to transfer this very young girl, the only daughter of a wealthy mother, from the world in which she had grown up to the sober house in the Hirschgraben. There would be little or no intercourse between their families—they differed in religion as well as in social connections—and on both sides

## Goethe

they regarded the future with uneasiness. It seems to me that these considerations explain and justify Goethe's action more satisfactorily than a selfish concern for his genius or his liberty.

In the midst of this hesitation, about the middle of May, the Stolbergs came to Frankfort. They were enthusiastic disciples of the *Sturm und Drang* school, Rousseauists of the most uncompromising character, recklessly unconventional and democratic. They hailed the author of *Götz* and *Werther* with the loudest good-fellowship, and brought a fresh breath, or breeze, of life into the musty house. Although they had rooms at the hotel, they dined with Goethe at home, and made the house warm with lurid sentiments. Frau Aja—as they called the mother, after some ancient German princess—regarded them leniently, as was her custom. When, after a few bottles of wine, they began to thirst for the blood of tyrants, she ran to the cellar for one of the choicest bottles left of the stock brought from the old Weidenhof. "Here's your tyrants' blood," she said. Goethe does not flatter her intellect as much as some of his biographers do when he remarks that she had seen prints of tyrants in old historical books, but thought that the race of ancient monsters was extinct. Councillor Goethe "shook his head."

They pressed Goethe to accompany them to Switzerland, to admire its glorious democratic liberties and its scenery. He consented, in order, he says, to see whether he could live without Lili. It is, no doubt, a roughly accurate description of

## Lili Schönemann

his frame of mind. Darmstadt was the first place of call. With them was young Count Haugwitz, a quiet and dignified youth, whom they put forward when the neighbourhood of a court compelled them to be respectable. One day, however, they discovered a pond near the town, and bathed, naked, in full daylight, causing a great scandal. Merck begged Goethe to quit "the lads," but he remained with them, and the four set out, in Werther costume and round grey hats of very rebellious shape, in search of further adventure. Leopold Stolberg professed that he was travelling in order to erase the memory of a beautiful Englishwoman, for whom he had a hopeless passion. When Goethe sympathised, as one not unacquainted with the misfortune, Stolberg angrily swore that there was no woman in the world, and no passion in the world, like his. After dinner at the hotel he made them drink her health, and then fling the "sacred glasses" against the wall. Goethe felt "as if Merck were pulling at his collar."

The course of that remarkable pilgrimage must be told briefly. They visited Strassburg, where Goethe saw Lenz and Salzmann and other old friends. They came to Karlsruhe, where they did reverence to Klopstock, and Goethe again met Karl August of Weimar, and was pressed to visit him at his Court. More important still was a visit he paid, from Karlsruhe, to his sister Cornelia. She had heard of Lili, and she begged Wolf not to do the fair young girl the injustice of taking her from her bright world into the Goethe house-

## Goethe

hold. She had no pleasant recollection of it, and marriage had not for her proved the door to happiness. She was a broken and dejected woman, nearer to death than either of them suspected. Goethe acknowledged that he had no answer to her arguments, but would make no promise. She had given clear shape to the vague scruples he had felt, and we cannot doubt that they directed his final decision.

He returned to the Stolbergs and they passed on boisterously to Zurich, where Goethe was delighted to visit Lavater in his own parish and sink deep once more into religious discussion. In the midst of it, on a Sunday morning, we find him writing such verse as: "Devil take us when there is no more wine and no more women." The Stolbergs rented a country house, and bathed defiantly; and they were stoned by the Swiss, and much checked in their admiration of democratic liberty. Goethe went on a tour of the canton with a friend. It was his first vision of majestic snow-crowned hills: the first intimation of the deep influence they would have on him in the course of the next few years. His mind was an instrument of so wide a range that he himself could see only discord in the tumult of his emotions. There were chords that responded to the gentle touch of Lavater, chords that vibrated deeply when the image of Lili rose in his memory, and chords that poured out wild music at the call of the Stolbergs or gave forth exalted strains at the sight of the Swiss mountains.

## Lili Schönemann

He returned, refreshed and subdued, to Lavater and his friends. One of them, Barbara Schulthess, a very serious and intellectual woman of thirty, was added to the list of his epistolary confidants. Then he rejoined the Stolbergs, and returned to Frankfurt, about the end of July, to take up again the tangled skein of his relations to Lili. Her family, naturally irritated at his long absence, pressed her to give him up, and urged the disadvantages of a union. Goethe was told by friends that Lili declared herself ready to meet them, and even to emigrate with him to America, if he desired. But this convincing proof of her devotion only enforced Goethe's scruples. It looked as if, in thinking of America, she dreaded the idea of living in his father's house, to which he must take her if he married her. He had no independent income, and little hope of one.

His letters to Augusta von Stolberg, in which we read the last page of the chapter, confirm his statement in the autobiography; he lived for some weeks in a "strange Hades," in which pleasure and pain were mingled. In this case, at least, there was no room for his adolescent theory that love is not closely related to marriage. It was his duty to leave her, but he could not drag himself from the magic circle of which she was the centre. On August 3rd he told Augusta von Stolberg that he was writing "in the room of the maid who, through no fault of hers, makes me unhappy." Again he went to André's house at Offenbach to be near her, and again the crowd of conventional people about



## Goethe

her irritated him. In a long, pleasantly satirical poem called "Lili's Park" he depicts her feeding the flock of strange beasts, including one animal, himself, that is "too tame for a bear and too savage for a poodle." He suffered honourable torture. Once more—and this time it was imperative—he must inflict a deep wound on the sensitive heart of a young girl.

A long letter to Augusta, written in the form of a diary, describes the last few days (September 14th to 19th). She, too, it appears, urged upon him the unsuitableness of the marriage. "The distance from her makes my bond all the closer," he says, but he adds later: "Courage, Gustgen, we will not put off each other to eternal life. We must be happy here: I must see Gustgen here—the one maid whose heart beats wholly in union with mine." He goes to Offenbach for the Sunday, this time in order to avoid Lili, and ends a happy day with the greeting: "Good-night, angel, thou sole, sole maiden." On the Monday he returns to "the sieve of the Danaids." "Will my heart," he writes, "ever know, in deep and true enjoyment and pain, the happiness that men desire, and not be tossed for ever on the waves of imagination and strained sensibility, now high as heaven, now deep as hell?" He sees Lili on the Monday night, and has nothing to say to her. "Would that I were free, Gustgen; yet I shrink from the moment when she will be indifferent to me, and I shall be hopeless." He is going to a ball in the evening, and sits down to pen a page of lamentation.

## Lili Schönemann

“What a life! Shall I continue, or end it for ever? Yet, dearest, when I feel that amidst all these trifles my heart is sloughing so many skins, the convulsive spasms of my foolish little composition are abating, my view of the world grows clearer, and my intercourse with men is surer, firmer, and broader, while my inmost being is reserved for sacred love alone, which gradually, by that spirit of purity which is itself, purges me of adulteration and will at last make me purer than fine gold, then I let things take their course—perhaps deceive myself—and thank God. Good-night. Addio. Amen.”

After that he dances until six in the morning. On the evening of the 20th he adds: “Have spoken seven words to Lili.” They were the last. She must have understood for some days at least that he had decided against marrying her.

This was the natural and inevitable termination of his love of Lili, but something had occurred on that day, September 20th, that may have braced his courage. Karl August of Weimar, now the ruling Duke, passed through Frankfort on his way to Darmstadt, to wed Luise of Hesse-Darmstadt. His invitation to Weimar now found a more attentive ear. He was an ideal prince for such a poet; an ardent admirer of *Götz* and *Werther*, a young man of outflowing vitality, impatient of etiquette and restrictions. He had now received the reins from his mother, and he pressed Goethe to pay him a long visit. Both must have vaguely felt and hoped that a visit would be the beginning of residence there.

## Goethe

Karl August went on to Darmstadt, and Goethe returned to literary work. The pieces he had produced in that troubled year are not of a high order. During the first months of his love he had written the tragedy *Stella*, in which a married man, Fernando, wavers between his wife Cæcile and Stella. Few would agree with Lewes's very disdainful verdict on the play, but the hero is unattractive and unplausible and the end unsatisfactory. The identification of the characters is uncertain. Some recognise in the trio Goethe, Lili (Stella) and Friederike; others think that the tragedy is based on the relations of Fritz Jacobi and Johanna Fahlmer. Probably there is a combination of characters and experiences. During the year he also wrote the negligible opera *Claudine von Villa Bella* and the better, but still slight, opera *Erwin und Elmire*. In the latter months of the year he wrote the greater part of his much more important tragedy *Egmont*, which was taken unfinished to Weimar.

In none of these plays does he approach the level of art that he had reached in *Werther*. The circumstances of his life were unfavourable to artistic concentration. It is, however, interesting to find that he had probably written a good deal of *Faust* before the end of 1775. He recalled in later years an early version of *Faust*—a "poor and confused" play, he called it; the present tragedy has, of course, the shape given to it by his mature power. Some years ago a manuscript copy of an early version of the tragedy was discovered, and, although

## Lili Schönemann

we cannot be sure that it is a simple copy of the unfinished tragedy which he took with him to Weimar, it is generally known as the *Urfaust*. Experts assign the manuscript to the early years of his life at Weimar. It contains twenty-one scenes—the first part of the great monologue, the duologues of Faust and Wagner and Mephistopheles and the student, the Auerbach Tavern scene, and the story of Gretchen. They seem to have been written in 1774 and the latter part of 1775. When Zimmermann visited him in August 1775 and asked to see his *Faust*, Goethe emptied a bag of loose papers on the table and said: "There's my *Faust*."

Zimmermann, a distinguished court physician and the famous writer of *On Solitude*, was one of his chief visitors in that year. Pestalozzi, the great educationist, was another. He had recently met Zimmermann at Strassburg, and asked him to spend a few days at his house. Zimmermann pronounced Goethe "one of the most extraordinary and powerful geniuses that has ever passed through this world." There was some living charm and power in the young poet which the biographer despairs of reproducing. We saw what Lavater and Fritz Jacobi said of him. Georg Jacobi described him as "one of the most extraordinary men alive, full of lofty genius." The poet Heinse found him "a genius from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet." We shall presently find an even greater judge, Wieland, using the same superlative language after a few days' acquaintance.

## Goethe

Zimmermann's young daughter, who was left in charge of Frau Goethe for some days, seems to have caught the infection. Bewailing the chilly sternness of her father, she begged Frau Goethe, with tears, to let her remain with them.

On the 12th of October Karl August returned with his bride to Frankfort, and Goethe accepted his invitation. Councillor Goethe vainly repeated his warning, and quoted Voltaire's experience at the court of Frederick. All of them felt that he was probably on the way to accept an appointment for life. There were accidents, however, and Goethe was to experience many hours of pain before he found rest in Weimar. The Duke and Duchess invited him to dinner. He went in his finery to their hotel, but there was some misunderstanding about the appointment, and he had to return dinnerless and deeply mortified. We can imagine the grim "I told you so," of Councillor Goethe. The mistake was explained, and Karl August took leave of him with great cordiality, saying that Chamberlain von Kalb, who was purchasing a carriage at Strassburg, would come on to Frankfort for him in a day or two.

Goethe bade farewell to his friends, and packed his books and manuscripts. October 15th came, but no carriage appeared; nor did it come the next day or the next. In fact, day after day, for a week, Goethe waited in the confinement of the house, too sensitive to let his friends see that he was still in Frankfort. His father urged him to abandon the idea; to make the long-projected tour in Italy,

## Lili Schönemann

and come back to begin life over again in Frankfort. He still listened impatiently, day and night, for the sound of wheels. One night, toward the end of the week, he could endure the confinement no longer. He wrapped himself in a large cloak, and went into the streets. As he passed the Schönemanns' house, he heard the piano, and stopped to listen. Lili was playing "Ah, how irresistibly thou drawest me," and he listened in great pain at the railings. When she had finished he strained his eyes to catch the contour of her shadow on the green blinds, and went home to his dreary vigil. At last he set out from home in the early morning for Heidelberg. He had a vague intention of going to Italy—unless the Weimar messenger came.

He had chosen Heidelberg because it lay on the route from Strassburg to Frankfort, and he at once gave instructions at the post that Von Kalb should be intercepted. At Heidelberg, moreover, lived Dorothea Delf, with whom he soon shared his trouble. She agreed with his father, pressed him to think no more of Weimar, and made him visit among her friends at Heidelberg. The autumn was fine, and he recovered his spirits. He notes that he liked especially to visit a certain W—— (generally identified as Councillor von Wreden), whose daughter "resembled Friederike." Demoiselle Delf noticed this, and sketched a new scheme for him. Why not go to Italy and return to Heidelberg to see if his "dawning inclination" for Fräulein von Wreden had stood the test of absence?

## Goethe

In a new and brighter town, in alliance with so distinguished a family, he might find the happiness he sought.

They were sitting late at night discussing his tangled affairs. Goethe was incapable of making a decision. Weimar and Italy and the undimmed memory of Lili struggled in his imagination. Really, he was listening all the time for the sound of carriage wheels. They separated at one in the morning, and a little later Goethe was aroused by the horn of a postillion. Demoiselle Delf presently came to his bedside with a letter. "Tell me what it is," she said. "If it is an invitation from Weimar, refuse." He asked her to leave him, to her annoyance, and read that Herr von Kalb had been unavoidably delayed, and was now awaiting him in Frankfort. He dressed and paced the room, and Demoiselle Delf again entered and urged him to refuse. He told her that he would make a short visit to Weimar, and then go to Italy; but she knew that he would stay at Weimar, and there was a "lively scene," he says. It is the last scene in the autobiography: possibly the strangest in that remarkable narrative. The postillion impatiently cracked his whip in the deserted street; the resolute little woman clung to Goethe, and showered arguments on him; the demonic guide within him—he had begun to believe that some such mystic spirit controlled him—ordered him to go. At last he wrenched himself from her and went, reciting the words he had written in *Egmont* :

## Lili Schönemann

“Child, child, no farther! Lashed by invisible spirits, the horses of the sun drag along the light vehicle of our fate, and all we can do is firmly to hold the reins and keep the wheels, now to right and now to left, from stone and precipice. Who knows whither it goes? It hardly remembers whence it came.”

It is the last line of *Poetry and Truth*: the last scene in the first part of Goethe's eventful life. I would add two quotations to complete this first part of the story. When he left Frankfort on October 30th he began to write a diary. On that first night, when he halted at Ebersbach, he wrote:

“Good-bye, Lili, for the second time. When I first parted from you, it was in the hope that our fates would yet be united. Now it is decreed that we must play our parts asunder. For the moment I am sad, for me and for thee: the outlook is so dim. Good-bye. And thou [Augusta von Stolberg], what shall I call thee, thee whom I bear in my heart like a flower of spring? Thou shalt be called a gracious flower. With what feeling do I part from thee? Confidence.”

Three years afterwards Lili married the banker Herr von Türckheim. Goethe had gone to bed at Weimar, when his servant brought the letter containing the news. In his letter to his next love, Frau von Stein, on the following day, he says that he broke the seal as he lay in bed, and read it. “And I turned over and went to sleep,” he adds. In the following year he passed through Strassburg,



## Goethe

where Lili lived, and admired her pretty baby. Another woman was enthroned in his heart, and ruled it more imperiously than Lili had ever done. But we shall again meet the figure of the beautiful woman—to me perhaps the most attractive in the gallery of Goethe's loves—when the storm of the French Revolution bursts upon her home at Strassburg.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MERRY MONTHS AT WEIMAR

I HAVE called the departure from Frankfort the close of the first part of Goethe's life. It will be understood that in this I am merely separating the unsettled early decades, with their wavering plans and migrations, from the long career which he is about to spend under the shelter of the Weimar Court. There is as yet no change of character; the adolescent spirit still lives in full strength within the early manhood. In a few years we shall see the youth slowly die and the grave ideals of the man rise to almost undisputed power. That will come of experience, responsibility, contact with reality, and the influence of an older woman than any he had yet loved. Before this happens, the lusty youth must spend itself in a last burst of gaiety. Goethe comes to Weimar as a guest, as the prophet of life and joy and love, as a companion or leader in pleasure; and he at once enters upon that famous holiday which the German biographers call the *lustige Zeit*, or the merry months, at Weimar.

The sun had not risen when, on the morning of November 7th, Von Kalb and he reached the goal of their long ride. The first grey light would disclose to him a poor little town of a few hundred houses, with a few larger homes of the Court and Court

## Goethe

officials rising above the cluster of mean roofs. If one would realise the first impression of Goethe, one must forget the pleasant memory of a bright and spacious city which every man retains who has visited modern Weimar. In 1775 a narrow wall penned in some six thousand inhabitants to the east of the palace and the park; indeed the palace had been burned down a little over a year before Goethe's arrival, and its charred skeleton, looking down on the wintry park and the dark river, would only add to the dreariness of the prospect. There was no commerce or industry or prosperity among the townsfolk. Apart from the few officials and tradesmen who lived on the Court, they had to wring a slender livelihood out of the surrounding fields. The town lay far from the coach-road from Leipsic to Frankfurt, and was rarely enlivened by visitors from the more stirring world which was understood to be somewhere below the rim of the horizon. It drew harsh words from nearly every literary man who entered it. The whole duchy contained only about a hundred thousand souls, who lived meagrely on the cultivation of the land, and could ill afford to sustain any great ducal splendour.<sup>1</sup>

But the day had not yet come when the poverty of the people would oppress Goethe. His fate lay with the Court—the Dowager-Duchess Amalia, the Duke Karl August and his wife. The little group

<sup>1</sup> See, especially, A. Dietzmann, *Goethe und die lustige Zeit in Weimar*, 1900. Lewes's chapters on the first ten years at Weimar are—apart from the appreciation of Frau von Stein—amongst the best that have been written, but suffer from their chronological disorder.

## The Merry Months at Weimar

of courtiers with whom he must laugh or from whom he must suffer. And he had not been there many days before he knew that it was to be laughter, heroic laughter.

Anna Amalia, mother of the reigning Duke, had brought with her from the Court of her father, the Duke of Brunswick, a taste for art and culture. With this she united, from her own character, a pleasant indifference to ceremony and law. She was a small, plain woman, with piercing eyes, a susceptible heart, and a genially virile temper. She had married the young Duke Konstantin in her eighteenth year; he died two years afterwards, leaving her two baby boys, a duchy, and a splendid independence. She managed the duchy very ably, fostered the university at Jena, brought a theatrical troupe to Weimar, and, after a time, made the poet Wieland tutor to her sons. She lived in what was called the Palais, across the town, and might not have had much restraining influence on her son, after she had put the sceptre in his hands on September 3rd of that year, if she had wished. But she did not wish. She held that a prince was greater even than the legislators of etiquette; and she was only thirty-six years old, still capable herself of tender emotions. With Wieland she read the broad comedies of Aristophanes, and she let him sleep on the sofa in her room when he was sleepy. She controlled the manners of her ladies, and left them to control their own morals, if they cared.

Karl August, her elder son, was not disposed to correct the liberality of his mother. One may dispute

## Goethe

whether his regard for culture was deep and native, or a mere concession to Goethe; it is generally agreed that he quickly showed himself to be an able ruler, a man of fine sentiment and judgment. But he was only eighteen years old when Goethe came to Weimar, and his first tutor, Goertz, had been feeble and incompetent. He was a full-blooded, handsome youth, fond of hard riding, deep drinking, free living, and the other superlatives of youth. Palaces and etiquette he disliked; he let the bones of the old palace rot for fifteen years in the sun and rain, and lived in the Fürstenhaus (Princes' House), a much smaller mansion. He had, it is true, talked political economy with Goethe at Frankfurt, and doubtless intended to chain him to Weimar by service in the ministry, but his first aim was to bring Goethe to share and adorn his pleasures. Of his negligible younger brother, Konstantin, we need only say that a few years later he married a French *cocotte*, boldly brought her to Weimar, and set Goethe a serious problem in the domestic economy of a court.

When Goethe came to Weimar, the Duchess Luise was still an uncertain personality, but she was gravely suspected of virtue. She is known in history as the woman of whom Napoleon said: "There is a woman who would not flinch before our two hundred cannons." During the period of gaiety at Weimar she showed her strength merely by disdainful silence. A tall, slender, graceful young woman of eighteen, always placid—except when, in the early days, she lashed Karl August for his dogs

## The Merry Months at Weimar

and tobacco and boisterousness—and attentive to forms, she shrank into her rooms on the first floor of the Fürstenhaus, and let the boors play. Her cold contemptuous eyes made Goethe uneasy. She was the first “angel” who frowned on him. Her situation was made worse by the fact that she remained childless for seven years.

Round these incongruous figures the officials ranged themselves in two uneven parties, though the subtle schism had not yet occurred. There was Frau von Stein, a prematurely worn, delicate lady of thirty-three, devoid of beauty and thin of blood, who, nevertheless, was to inspire the greatest passion of Goethe’s passionate life. There was—also of Amalia’s suite—little, misshapen Luise von Göchhausen, twenty-three years old, as merry and malicious as she was clever. Then there was the Baroness Emilie von Werthern-Beichlingen, a very handsome and sensuous young woman of eighteen, united to a much older man (Amalia’s private secretary), until her hot blood boiled over and she most romantically eloped, after a mock funeral, with a young lieutenant. Countess Jeanette Luise von Werthern auf Neunheiligen was a dainty mercurial lady of twenty-three—“fine as quicksilver,” Goethe says—more intimate with the Duke than a lady of the Court need be. In a word, there was a group of young noble ladies, mostly pretty and fond of music and poetry and enjoyment; and each of them—so Schiller said, when he came to live at Jena—had, or had had, “an affair of the heart.”

The phrase partly indicates the men. One of the

## Goethe

permanent jokes of the Court was the fidelity to his wife of Wieland. The poet, then forty-four years old, was one of the old fogies of the Court. Of the same age was the President of the Privy Council, Von Fritsch, a blunt, useful minister. Then came a number of young men. Bertuch, the Duke's private secretary, had studied theology, then law, and was now, in his twenty-ninth year, a poet, scholar, amateur actor, and excellent man of business. Chamberlain von Einsiedl, a tall thin young man of twenty-five, commonly known as "l'ami" (or friend of everybody), was very good at cards and billiards, music and theatricals, and a very good fellow; though he hated beer so much that he would neither write nor read the word. Lieutenant von Knebel, the officer who had first presented Goethe to Karl August, was a man of fine culture and character, in his thirty-second year. Head Forester von Wedel was a witty and very handsome youth in his teens. The teacher Musäus was a sarcastic ex-clergyman, who had lost his parish by dancing in public. There were less genial men, who in time formed a sullen opposition: Count Goertz, the early tutor, Chamberlain von Kalb, who played false to Goethe, Chamberlain von Seckendorff, who had expected the position which was given to Goethe, and others. We will know them better in the course of time.

Into this amiable and interesting company Goethe made a triumphant entry. It is enough to quote the impression of the sober Wieland, whom he had caricatured not long before. "My soul is as full

## The Merry Months at Weimar

of him as a drop of dew is of the morning sun," he wrote to Jacobi, three days after Goethe's arrival; and he wrote an enthusiastic poem on the "enchanter." Goethe's tall slender person was dressed in the Werther costume, his very arresting and handsome face, with the large lustrous eyes which even Wieland calls black, was of itself enough to concentrate their looks on him, and his great poetic reputation gave him the position of a master in this circle of amateur poets. Responding to their advances, he left dormant every serious element in his nature and entered upon a wild and prolonged holiday. Karl August, himself a very handsome young man with merry blue eyes and an insatiable thirst for pleasure, hailed him as a brother. In a short time all the men, except Wieland, were dressed in the blue coat and buff vest and breeches of Werther, and the orders of the day were fun and liberty.

Dancing, skating, hunting, concerts, theatricals, smoking and drinking parties, and flirtations, made the winter fly. Skating had not yet been introduced into Weimar, and, when Goethe led the way, it was cultivated with all the enthusiasm of a new joy. Even Duchess Luise learned to skate. Entries of expense in the account-books of the time show that they sometimes spent long hours of the night on the ice, a band of frozen musicians playing on the bank, and a number of the Duke's hussars being distributed with lighted torches over the lake. On other days a hunt or an excursion summoned them to horse, and the Duke and Goethe and the younger



## Goethe

men rode at a desperate and dangerous gallop over the roughest tracts of the frozen country.

Within doors there were readings, concerts, and private theatricals. The theatre had been burned down with the palace, and the troupe dispersed, but they had fitted up a house in the town and formed an amateur company, before Goethe came. He joined cordially, both as actor, composer, and, ultimately, director. The performances were private and the "properties" limited, so that many an unrehearsed comedy or tragedy occurred. Dietzmann tells that on one occasion, when a big performer, leading a troop of soldiers, had donned tights for want of a more suitable costume, he sprang up so vigorously at the cue that—the curtain had to fall hurriedly. On another occasion Bertuch was to spring from the wings and kill a rival. But the rival forgot the cue-words. Goethe sent Bertuch out to kill him without a cue, but he refused to die in so disorderly a fashion. "In the name of three devils die, man," Bertuch said, in a loud whisper. He still declined to fall, and Goethe "thundered" from the wings: "If he won't die in front, stick him behind." Bertuch felled him with a heavy blow of the fist, and two attendants rushed on and bore him away. Goethe himself caused no little confusion at first by extemporising, instead of following the book; and it was noticed at his first appearance that he embraced the heroine (a sister of Kotzbue) much more warmly than theatrical life requires. But we are running ahead of the *lustige Zeit*, and will return later to his theatrical work.

## The Merry Months at Weimar

There is nothing very scandalous in this authentic record, taken from contemporary letters, of the merry months that followed Goethe's arrival, and the unascetic reader hardly understands the shiver that crept over respectable Germany. That the sober older officials and the burghers should look on with frowns when the ducal party caroused on the open terrace, or spent the night on the ice, or enlivened the quiet evenings from the house of one or other courtier, was quite natural, but a rumour went over half Germany that, since Goethe's coming, the Weimar Court was plunged in orgies. Stories which we cannot control were dispatched far and wide, and lingered long among the traditions of Weimar. It was said that the Duke and Goethe cracked whips against each other, for a wager, in the market-place at Jena. It was said that, when Fritz Stolberg came, a few weeks after Goethe, they celebrated his arrival, in Bertuch's room, by a supper in which funeral urns were substituted for glasses; a finer version of the story is that they welcomed the democratic noble by drinking the wine (which romance has even changed into blood) out of skulls. A less romantic and better authenticated story—in substance—is that the Duke and Goethe one night brought in a mason and walled up the door of the bedroom of Duchess Amalia's lively little maid, Luise von Göchhausen. Then they, or a provident draught, blew out her candle as she went upstairs, and they enjoyed her startled fumbling in the dark for her doorway.

A story of another type may be given in order

## Goethe

to illustrate the rumours that were spread over Germany. The Duchess Amalia proposed that they should invite the famous actress Corona Schröeter to Weimar. Goethe, who had admired her classical beauty of form and great skill in acting at Leipsic, secured her for their theatre; her official position was singer in the church choir. She was a fascinating, accomplished and voluptuous woman, and there is no doubt that the Duke had a passion for her. Goethe had some difficulty in persuading him that even at Weimar a reigning Duke must not make open love to an actress, but we shall see that his own heart was not a little agitated. He often entertained her at his house, and spent many hours at her house. We read in his diary (January 6th, 1777): "At Corona's until ten o'clock. Not slept—palpitations and heat." The story to which I refer is that the Duchess Luise once came upon Corona, in flesh-coloured garments, playing the guitar in a secluded corner of the park with her husband and Goethe for audience.

No doubt many of these stories are fiction. There were those at Weimar who were disposed to exaggerate the gaieties of the Court. The letters of the unhappy Duchess to her friends at various Courts would not give an indulgent account of what was happening; and officials who were angry at the promotion of Goethe would not spare him. Letters circulated throughout Germany. Merck said that he could have filled a volume with the stories that were current in Frankfort. Klopstock wrote to rebuke Goethe for not restraining the Duke, and,

158

## The Merry Months at Weimar

when Goethe curtly told him to spare his writing-paper, broke off his relations with him.

It would be very interesting to know how much licence there really was at Weimar in that historic outburst, but we cannot regard any of these stories, even that of the whip-contest in Jena market-place, with confidence. It seems clear that for a long time Goethe became a student again, and knew little, if any, restraint. He shared the wildest rides of the Duke, drank as deeply as any, led and organised their pleasures and flirted freely. "We are doing the devil's own work," he wrote; and Wieland, thinking of his enemies, said that he had "given the devil a hold on him." In another place Goethe describes them as "the strangest company ever got together." More than once he tells Frau von Stein—his spiritual lover—that he has been in a bad temper and has betaken himself to the *misels* (a Strassburg student-word for lively young ladies). As late as the summer, when he is a Privy Councillor, he bathes by night in the Ilm, and startles belated passers-by by suddenly raising his head, with hanging wet locks over the pale face, from the water and uttering hideous groans. They were the last flickers of youth.

It is almost a convention of Goethe biographies that he drank and rode and sang and flirted with the Duke merely, or chiefly, in order to gain his confidence so that he might more effectively guide him. Bielschowsky adds that it was expedient for him first to show that he was the physical equal, as well as the intellectual superior, of the Duke. I am not

## Goethe

more disposed to see calculation in this merriment at Weimar than in the abandonment of his earlier loves. Who can read his letters and fail to perceive that he thoroughly enjoyed himself? There is no ground in his character or in any extant document for saying that from the first he wished to exercise a serious influence over Karl August, and concluded that he must either enter fully into his pleasures for a time or abandon him at once. However much he may have reflected on the possibility of his being invited to stay as a minister, he had been invited only to pay a long visit and share the Duke's pleasures. It is wholly in accord with his character that he should do so; and the unexpected geniality of nearly the whole Court, the splendid intoxication of the winter sports, and the infectious vitality of the Duke, made him forget everything but that he was a happy and healthy child of nature.

There is no precise term to what his biographers call the *lustige Zeit*. Some of the anecdotes I have given belong to the latter part of 1776 or the beginning of 1777. But action and reaction were never far apart in Goethe's life, and we may trace the slow, spasmodic emergence of a more sober feeling from about four months after his arrival. The disdainful eyes of the young Duchess disconcerted him, and the Duke was too exacting. He had once to tell Karl August that "it was no use having fireworks at noon." He began to interest the Duke in art, and would detain him so long at night that they would then sleep side by side on the sofa. In February he pressed the Duke to bring Herder to

160

## The Merry Months at Weimar

Weimar, and make him superintendent of ecclesiastical affairs. His effort must have brought sobering reflections, but there was much opposition, and Herder did not come until late in the year. Probably the Duke was not very eager to instal the severe thinker in his Court. In April Lenz came to join the revels; though Goethe had to reprimand him for his conduct at a ball on the first night, and had soon to send him away. Other *Sturm und Drang* minstrels found their way to the shrine, but the growing opposition prevented Goethe from helping them. There was as yet little change in his disposition. Klopstock's grave remonstrance, declaring that the young Duke was ruining his constitution with drink and dissipation, reached him in May, and he made no defence of his conduct. He gives not the least intimation, even in his private letter to Klopstock, that he was merely winning the Duke's friendship for a good purpose.

This and other remonstrances would, however, temper his gaiety, and there were other serious influences. One was his love of Frau von Stein, which may be deferred to the next chapter. It began a month or two after his arrival in Weimar. It is certainly significant that, in the very height of his gaiety, he loses his heart to one of the oldest, most retiring, and least sensuous ladies of the place; but he speaks to her so freely of his and the Duke's sport with the *misels* that we can hardly regard her as a very serious influence at that time. The more sobering influence was his increasing interest in politics.

## Goethe

Karl August began very soon to consult Goethe on questions of policy and administration. The first grave point was that, before the end of 1775, Von Fritsch, the President of the Privy Council, his ablest minister, threatened to resign. The new régime was repugnant to him. Karl August, who had suffered a wholesome restraint from him, was disposed to let him go, but Goethe pressed that he should be retained. In February the Duke told Von Fritsch that Goethe must enter the Privy Council, and there was another struggle. The sober minister saw a long procession of Stolbergs and Lenzs coming to Weimar to swell the lusty chorus. He resigned. The Duke replied (May 10th) firmly that the murmurs at the promotion of Goethe made no impression on him. Goethe had such signal and manifest ability that he would be dispensed from passing through inferior offices. The Dowager-Duchess intervened, Von Fritsch retained his post, and on June 11th Dr. Goethe became Geheimer Legationsrath Goethe (Privy Legation-Councillor), to the accompaniment of a sullen murmur of discontent throughout the official world. To that may be traced many of the more romantic stories of his first wild weeks at Weimar.

During the first five months Goethe had lived at the house of Chamberlain von Kalb, but when it became clear that he was to take service and stay in Weimar, he rented a house. A salary of 1200 thalers (less than £200) a year was not inconsiderable at Weimar, little as it seems to us. The Duke, however, further presented him with a house and,

## The Merry Months at Weimar

unconsciously, gave him an opportunity for sober reflection, and hastened his secession from the gaieties of the Court. The ducal park or garden at Weimar was separated from the town and palace by the river Ilm, the west bank of which was the park. Some distance down the park is the cottage which is now known to visitors from all parts of the world as "Goethe's garden-house." It had only one room and a kitchen below, one bedroom and two "cabinets" above. Its charm was in its situation. It stood in a larger garden than a house could have in the walled enclosure of the town, and before its windows was the soothing calmness of the narrow valley and the broad silvery stream of the Ilm. In 1776 it belonged to Bertuch; but when the Duke learned that Goethe would more willingly remain in Weimar if he had such a house, he brusquely evicted and compensated his secretary, and put the cottage at Goethe's disposal. A few years afterwards he made him a present of it.

It was in the month of June 1776, that Goethe began to live in the garden-house. The mere fact that he so earnestly desired to have this quiet and solitary residence indicates that he was, at least occasionally, tired of the *lustige Zeit* and disposed to enjoy hours of lonely communion with nature. During the day the path that ran by the house might at any moment bring him visitors, but he would at night find himself master of a solitary world. He had only one servant, his man Philip, and he himself took a close interest in the garden. Sometimes he slept in the open air on the terrace, wrapped in his



## Goethe

cloak. The river below the meadows also attracted him, and he bathed in it summer and winter, in the early morning or by the light of the moon. His healthy life in the garden-house was to last for six years, and must be regarded as a serious element in his development. He had at first no desire to be a hermit. He entertained his friends there constantly, and attended the evening gatherings at their houses across the river, where his wit and inventiveness still made him the prince of entertainers. But the hours of quiet meditation grew longer, and before many years we shall find him locking at night the gates on the bridges which lead from the town and Court to the garden, and his friends complaining that they cannot pass his "barricades."

His work as a Councillor began to awaken him to the stern realities below the pleasant surface of life. It was at first comparatively slight. He was the youngest member of the Council, and was chiefly engaged in making reports, or serving on special commissions. In July he had, as a member of the Commission of Mines, to accompany the Duke to Ilmenau, where some abandoned mines were to be restored. If we compare his description (in the poem "Ilmenau") of a later visit, we may assume that business was much relieved by pleasure. They made reckless rides over the wild district, raised rough huts of fir-branches, cooked the game they had shot, and sat round the fire smoking, drinking, and joking like a party of backwoodsmen, or even danced with the peasant girls. For Goethe, however, the business was a serious preoccupation, the beginning

## The Merry Months at Weimar

of a very earnest and painstaking effort to develop the resources of the duchy. He belonged also to other commissions, and took a keen interest in their work. The control of the theatre, which was assigned to him, is only part of the work that he did even in his earlier years at Weimar.

Unofficially he was doing much more serious work. Karl August regarded him from the first as a special adviser, and discussed with him in private the gravest administrative affairs. He had begun his career at Weimar as master of the revels; he was rapidly passing into the virtual position of chief minister. In preparation for it he made a profound study of those branches of the administration in which he was concerned. Mining was the chief of these subjects, and he took great pains to acquire a technical mastery of it, and was tempted to wander into the adjacent fields of geology and physics. We shall see that this interest led him, in 1777, to make a journey alone, in the depth of winter, to the Hartz Mountains, and that this journey marks a most important stage in his serious development. It intensified his interest in natural phenomena, gave him a clear insight into and sympathy with the lives of the workers, and, above all, the wintry grandeur of the mountains released in flood those deeper, half-religious emotions which were slowly displacing the last passions of his youth.

To the action of these sobering agencies must be added the influence of Frau von Stein, which we will consider in the next chapter, and the influence of Herder, who came to settle at Weimar in October

## Goethe

(1776). Probably the influence of Herder was very indirect. Whether from jealousy or from dislike of his occasional levity and his flirting, Herder was estranged from him for some time. His presence, however, would not be without effect. Goethe was not the man to be wholly unmoved by the disdain he would see in the penetrating black eyes of Herder and the pained looks of Duchess Luise. Thus a number of influences were at work, checking his gaiety, before the end of his first year at Weimar. His strong, lusty youth struggled with these shades, and scattered them at times, as a dying sun occasionally blazes out amidst the dark vapours that are gathering about it. He would, on literary evenings, startle his friends with the brilliance and wit of his improvisations; he would write to tell Frau von Stein, in the tone of an undergraduate, of the hours of fun he has just had with "the girls." As director of the theatrical life he had constantly to devise new entertainments in honour of birthdays, and to endure Herder's sneer that he was the Duke's "maître de plaisir." Corona Schroeter came to Weimar in November (1776), and his theatrical work was, on that account, much increased in 1777 and 1778. In a word, the first three years were a time of varied and conflicting moods, during which his more serious nature was slowly asserting its authority. But we must consider his relation to Frau Von Stein before we trace, in chronological order, the course of what is vaguely called his conversion.



KATHCHEN SCHONKOPF.

Photo by L. Held, Weimar

## CHAPTER IX

### THE SUNSET OF YOUTH

THAT maturing of Goethe's character which is sometimes called his conversion is frequently misrepresented. It was, in the first place, no swift and decisive change of heart, converting an unrestrained youth, either after his journey to Switzerland in 1779 or his Italian tour in 1787, into a grave master of science and art. One would imagine, from some of the references to it, that, to make it historical, we must turn about the magical transformation in *Faust*, and see the gay youth suddenly changed into a musty scholar. The more authoritative biographers have never countenanced such a view. It is more correct to regard the whole decade from 1776 to 1786 as the period of change. It was the slow setting of his fiery youth: not the tropical sunset, in which the velvet pall of night drops rapidly over the last splendid flames, and the silver stars shine forth at once from untroubled depths, but the sunset of the north, in which the dying light struggles and mingles with the advancing darkness, and, long after the sun has gone down, quivering fires may spread over the sky and dim the feeble stars.

Further, this change of disposition which we begin to detect in Goethe toward the close of his

## Goethe

third decade of life had not a moral and religious significance, in the usual sense of the words. He never returned to the creed which he had discarded in his early youth, though his religious feeling, his reverence for nature as the garment of God, expanded and deepened when he came to contemplate the sublime scenery of the mountains. Much further astray is the idea that the change involved any "moral" conversion in the narrower sense of the word. The journey to Italy is the culmination of the change, yet it was immediately after his return from Italy that he entered upon the one open sensual liaison of his career, and the poems in which he sang it (chiefly the "Roman Elegies") are defiantly unconventional. We may assume—Goethe, as I said, never confesses anything—that he had lived as other young men of his station and temper lived; and it would be merely foolish to imagine that he, having no ascetic principles, had played the ascetic among the frail ladies of the Weimar Court. We may further assume that after 1788 he restricted himself to the woman whom he brought to share his home, to the scandal even of Weimar, and whom he married about twenty years afterwards. That is the measure of his moral conversion, in the stricter sense of the word. Yet there can be little doubt that Goethe would have described the change as a profound moral advance. The Nietzscheans who acclaim Goethe as one of their heroes seem to be under the impression that he died in his early thirties, or are strangely ignorant that he passed from egoism to altruism,

168

## The Sunset of Youth

from unrestrained indulgence to a sober and severe self-command at that period.

In this inevitable triumph of the more manly element in his nature a not inconsiderable part was played by Frau von Stein.<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Ernestine Albertine von Stein was the wife of Karl August's master of horse, Friedrich von Stein. Her father, Herr von Schardt, had been a Court marshal at Weimar; her mother had been a Scottish lady named Irving. She was in her thirty-fourth year when Goethe came to Weimar, and such charm of face and figure as she still possessed—she had never been beautiful—was subdued by the evidences of strain and sorrow. She had borne seven children in the eleven years of her married life, and had lost four of them; and now, delicate and emotional as she was, she lived an uncongenial life with a heavy and insensitive husband. As she was a woman of fine nature, the experience had given her an expression and character which to Goethe seemed not less than beautiful. The physician Zimmermann had shown him her silhouette, among many others, in 1775, and he had written under it: "What a glorious spectacle it would be to see the world reflected in such a soul!" He declared that it disturbed his sleep for three nights. Zimmermann told Frau von Stein, and she longed to see the young poet. She had, of course, read *Werther*. Zimmermann warned her: "You do not know how dangerous this amiable and charming man may be to you."

<sup>1</sup> See, especially, W. Bode's *Charlotte von Stein*, 1910.

## Goethe

It was in this inflammable, if not inflamed, mood that they met at Weimar shortly after Goethe's arrival. He found her a slender, graceful woman, well dressed, as delicate in feeling and culture as he had expected, and his heart was engaged all the more surely when he realised her position. Her husband, genially impatient of delicacy, spent all his time at the Court, and left her to rear her children in solitude in the little house they had opposite the Fürstenhaus. Within a very short time Goethe again glowed at white heat, and the long series of his love-letters to Frau von Stein began. It was, we may recall, the *lustige Zeit*; the time of unrestrained gaiety, of hard riding with the Duke, untiring sport on the ice, generous drinking, and endless dancing and flirting. A dozen young, pretty, amiable ladies of the Court were joining in the revelry day and night. Yet day after day he sat in the house of the grave and spiritual recluse, fondling her children, gazing into her eyes with a fire that could not fail to enkindle some reflection of itself. For the first time in her life she was appreciated. When he could not visit, he wrote; after a time, indeed, he wrote a letter to her every morning, if it were only to tell her that he had slept or not slept, and insisted on having a reply. Herr von Stein himself often volunteered, amiably, to carry the notes or flowers. He seems to have been amused to see this wild, lusty, handsome youth, the genius of the Court, making love to his poor creature of a wife. When the Court was away, the hussars would serve as postmen. By 1787 she had more



## The Sunset of Youth

than a thousand letters which she had received from Goethe, and was still receiving one almost every week from Italy. It is from these letters that we learn the fierceness of his love and the character of her influence over him. Her letters to him have not survived, though a letter in his play *Die Geschwister* is believed to be a reproduction of one.

In January 1776 Goethe is already writing to her in passionate language. "Dear angel . . . Dear lady, permit me to love you so much . . . Adieu, gold, thou knowest not how much I love thee," he writes on January 28th. In February he addresses her as "thou one amongst women who hast put into my heart a love that makes me happy." The letter introduced in *Die Geschwister* evidently belongs to this period, a few months after his arrival, and shows that she at first made frank return of his affection. It runs :

"The world is again dear to me; I had detached myself from it, and you have made me love it once more. My heart troubles me; I feel that I am bringing pain on you and me. Six months ago I was ready to die : I am no longer."

The only other expression of hers that we have is the phrase written in her solitude on one of Goethe's letters : "The dear, dear sin." But we can gather the further course of their relations from his letters. The increasing fire of his passion alarmed her, and led to talk in Weimar. She urged him to control himself, if not to avoid her. "Adieu, sister, since it must be so," he writes in April; and

## Goethe

a few weeks later he says : " So the purest, fairest, truest relation I have ever had with women, except my sister, must be abandoned ! And all this for the sake of the world, which can be nothing to me." This was written at the very time when the rumours of his dissipation were scattered over Germany, and Klopstock was writing to rebuke him.

The relation was not abandoned, and for some time the letters betray a struggle of the tender "thou" and the formal "you." He found so much rest and refreshment in her company after his boisterous hours ; he felt—there was throughout life a thin vein of mysticism in Goethe—that there was a mysterious affinity between their souls. When he moved into the garden-house, he was hardly ten minutes' walk from her house. He dined with her and taught and played with the children. On other days she would bring a companion and spend hours in his garden. Weimar was interested, but the general feeling was, Schiller said some years afterwards, that the relation was "pure and blameless." Goethe wrote of it in August : "Thy relation to me is so holy, so unusual, that I feel it to be right. It cannot be expressed in words, and men cannot see it." But she seems again to have curbed him, since we find him writing :

"Why should I torment thee, dearest creature? Why deceive myself and cause thee to suffer so much? We can be nothing to each other, yet are too much to each other. Believe me that thou art one with me in all things. But just because I see things as they are, it makes me mad. Good-night,

## The Sunset of Youth

angel, and good-morning. I will not see thee again. Only—thou knowest all—I have a heart—all I could say is unsaid. I look on thee afar as one gazes at a star. Think over that.”

It was the end of the first phase of his love for Frau von Stein. Probably her firm refusal to be more than a friend to him, or, more correctly, her determination that the veil should not be lifted from the love that existed in the hearts of both, did more to restrain him than her advice could do. By the spring we find that they again see each other constantly, no doubt on condition that Goethe behaves as a friend. The letters are calm, prosy, though the fire occasionally breaks through the crust. “Dear gold,” his favourite superlative, occurs in one; and in another he says: “With my hopes I hang between heaven and earth.” We may believe that she found it impossible to drive him away. She now saw him daily with Corona Schroeter. In June she invited him (and others) to spend some days at her country house at Kochberg, and bound him more closely. We need not, with Lewes, call her a coquette. She restrained and repelled him, from a strong sense of principle, when his passion showed too plainly its dangerous character, but we can hardly blame her for being unwilling entirely to abandon so rare a lover to Corona Schroeter or the *misels* of the Court.

For a few years, therefore, Goethe continued to be in a strangely intimate yet controlled relation to Frau von Stein, and his letters show that the

## Goethe

intimacy tended to encourage his graver feelings. Many other things happened to further this influence. In June (1777) his sister Cornelia died, after giving birth to a child, and he was saddened for many days. He had known, since his visit to her, that the life that had been linked so happily to his in earlier years was ending in misery. An unhappy home had driven her into an uncongenial marriage and a strange land. About the same time Goethe undertook the responsibility of rearing a boy who had been left to his care by Baron von Lindau. He also devoted his time more seriously to science, especially botany and geology. Weimar regarded with misgiving the bits of rock and the plants which began to absorb his enthusiasm, and youth still struggled with the advancing gravity, and at times had its way. During a visit to the old mines at Ilmenau the Duke and he spent merry evenings that recalled the early months, dancing and flirting, in the disguise of miners, with the young girls of the district.

In November, however, Goethe made a solitary journey to the Hartz Mountains, and his more serious feelings were richly cultivated. On the way he called, concealing his name, on a poor misanthrope named Plessing, who had written for advice, as so many morbid brooders did, to the author of *Werther*. That superb romance was beginning to lie uneasily in Goethe's memory, and we shall presently find him poking fun at it. Early in December he found himself at the foot of the Brocken. It was shrouded in mist, and the people

## The Sunset of Youth

of the valley shuddered when he asked them to guide him to the summit in the depth of winter. When, however, the mists cleared and revealed its solemn wintry grandeur, he pressed so earnestly that a forester accompanied him. On December 10th he looked down from the snow at its summit upon the majestic hills. During the next few days his letters to Frau von Stein were tinged with religious emotion. "God is dealing with me as with His saints of old," he said.

Another and very different feeling was nourished during this journey. Few in England now read the second part of *Faust*, and are aware that the egoism of the rejuvenated scholar is chastened, in the main, by two influences: the emotion engendered by the majesty of the Alps and a sympathy with his poorer fellows. It is, in large measure, the story of Goethe. His journeys to the Hartz Mountains in 1777 and to Switzerland in 1779 had a great part in the modification of his character. The thrilling pleasures that had seemed so large and absorbing when one lived amongst them shrank into terrible insignificance in face of these spectacles of calm and massive beauty. It is also during the journey of 1777 that we find his feeling for the people reaching its sharpest expression. Jaded with Court life, he found a charming freshness and sincerity in the lives of the workers. Perhaps he forgot that they were on their good behaviour, as even courtiers might be, before the observant stranger. He wrote to Frau von Stein: "How this solitary journey has taught me to love the class of

## Goethe

men that is called the lower, but is certainly the highest in the eyes of God." His feeling would sink, but not die, on his return. When he becomes an active and powerful minister, we shall find him more deeply concerned to colour the grey lives of the workers than to fatten the Duke's purse. The French Revolution will again modify his feeling, and make him definitely aristocratic in attitude, but in his mind aristocracy will always mean a government of the people for the people, not for the governors.

We already know Goethe too well to imagine that he will come down from the mountain-top and straightway bury himself in his hermitage. He returns to the Court, and, at least on the theatrical side, shares its gaiety. On this side his co-operation was indispensable, and the year 1778 was to be a very busy one in the preparation of comedies, tragedies, operas, ballets and spectacles. It was in that year that he built the hut in the park called the Borkenhaus (Bark-house), in which the Duke afterwards lived, with more than Spartan simplicity, at times. Goethe surprised and charmed the Court with the wonderful spectacle he had prepared in it. His theatrical activity was the strongest chain that held him to the gayer company. They played, not only in the private theatre at Weimar, but in the summer palaces at Tiefurt and Belvedere, in the open forest at Ettersburg, at Jena and other places; and gay were the cavalcades that rode out from Weimar when these excursions were arranged, and loud the merriment that crowned the night.

## The Sunset of Youth

Yet fresh sobering messages continued to reach Goethe from the ideal world. A few weeks after his return from the Hartz, in January, he had a narrow escape from grave accident, if not death. His spear snapped at a critical moment in a boar hunt. Shortly afterwards one of the young maids of the Court drowned herself in the Ilm near his house. She had been jilted and, it seems, had taken to drink; but Goethe learned with great pain that, when they bore the body of the unfortunate Christel von Lassberg to the nearest house, which happened to be that of Frau von Stein, they found a copy of *Werther* in her pocket. As she was seen intoxicated on the previous evening, the circumstance had no serious significance, but it would give a sharp edge to the comedy, *The Triumph of Sensibility*, which Goethe produced soon afterwards. In this piece he heavily satirises the morbid emotionalism which his novel was wrongly believed by many to consecrate. As he pointedly introduced his novel into the play, it is claimed that he thus publicly disavowed it. That is true only in a very qualified sense. The letters he was writing that very year to Frau von Stein were models of sensibility, and might have been written by Werther himself. He had not outgrown Wertherism, nor could he ever disavow the undying beauty of his work. It is sometimes forgotten that the chief criticism of *Werther*, from the artistic point of view, contains the best justification of its author. He did not make the young man commit suicide solely because he was disappointed in love; he was

## Goethe

equally disappointed in his profession. However, Goethe was weary of receiving letters from men and women who brooded over his supposed gospel of suicide, and of the crude imitations of his story, and in that sense he condemned it.

In the spring he accompanied the Duke to Berlin, and learned to dislike Court life more than ever. He found intrigue, selfishness and insincerity on a larger scale than ever, and passed almost in silence through the cities of Prussia, not caring even to meet their literary men. He did not see Frederick; it was enough, he disdainfully observed, to see his apes and parrots and curs. To the satisfaction of his many critics in Prussia he left behind a repute for conceit and moroseness. We learn his real feeling from his letters. "The greater the world," he wrote to Frau von Stein from Berlin, "the sorrier the farce; I swear that no filth or stupidity of the boors is as bad as the nature of the big men, middle men and little men here." He returned to work and writing at Weimar in a bitter mood. "Frozen against all men," he writes in his diary in December; and a little later: "I was not made for this world; you cannot leave the house without stepping in filth."

Even such an intimate friend as Frau von Stein did not know the full extent of the philanthropy which he concealed under this disdainful mantle. In that very year he was troubled with letters from a morbid young man who claimed that the author of *Werther* should relieve his melancholy. Again Goethe wrote kindly letters, and, when they failed,



## The Sunset of Youth

sent the man clothing and money. Although the man does not seem to have been either attractive or worthy, Goethe would not abandon him, and in the end he undertook the entire burden of supporting him. For many years he sent a seventh of his income to this stranger, and not a soul in Weimar knew of it. He gave him the false name of Kraft—his real name is still unknown—and left the world to discover after his death the story of this singular and noble deed.

The following year, 1779, marks a further stage in the development of his character. It is apparent, first, in the great tragedy, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, which he wrote in the later months of 1778 and the beginning of 1779. Apart from the fragment of *Prometheus* his early zeal for Greek tragedy had not tempted him to touch classical themes. He was not to imitate, but to find in German life an inspiration akin to that of the Greeks. In his new mood, however, the apparent calmness, even amid tragedy, of the remote and stately literature of Greece induced him to imitate. There seemed to be something of the immateriality of memory in these ancient figures and episodes; he could, especially in drama, delineate a maiden without putting into her the sensuous charm and hot passions which he would lend even to an imaginary character of contemporary life. He found a fitting theme in the legend of Diana carrying off Iphigenia at the moment when her father is about to sacrifice her; and his drama describes the discovery of her, as priestess at Tauris, by her brother Orestes.

## Goethe

With this play Goethe enters upon what is called the classical phase of his art. His song no longer rises and falls impetuously and defiantly with every phase of passion; the measured verse must keep its dignity, stateliness and restraint in every situation. It is true that the feeling, especially the moral feeling, is not Greek, and that the play ignores the devices of the stage for which it was not primarily intended; though German critics are rightly scornful of Lewes's discovery that some of its features are "juvenile."<sup>1</sup> The fine characterisation and the beautiful diction raise it to the rank of Goethe's great works. It is also worth noting, though rarely noticed, that it expresses a very clear sympathy with woman in her position of subordination. Goethe took the part of Orestes, when it was staged, and is said by Dr. Hufeland, who was present, to have suggested the Greek idea of Apollo by his striking combination of physical and intellectual beauty. Corona Schroeter, who played Iphigenia, looked so well in her Greek robes that she walked the streets in them.

Art alone could not satisfy the craving for work which Goethe now experienced. It had something of the egoism of pleasure. All round the pretty park and Court at Weimar were leagues of territory in which people suffered and hungered. The idea

<sup>1</sup> This refers only to dramatic quality. Lewes very finely appreciates the work as a literary production, which was Goethe's main concern. However, Lewes's heavy criticism of Iphigenia's failure to fly into her brother's arms the moment he tells his name is not at all justified. The play, as we have it, was carefully revised in Italy eight years later.

## The Sunset of Youth

of playing in a pleasant garden in the midst of an impoverished duchy was becoming repugnant. He had begun to peep over the walls. He had been writing his *Iphigenia* in the country district of Apolda, where some dislocation of trade had brought great distress on the stocking-makers. "I can't go on," he wrote to Frau von Stein; "the King of Tauris has to talk as if there were no famished stocking-makers in Apolda." He sought further office, and obtained the direction of the War Commission and the Highways and Canals Commission. This compelled him to travel over the whole duchy, selecting and examining recruits, surveying the roads, superintending the arrest of floods and the extinction of fires. He was well aware that, small as the duchy was, he was undertaking a formidable task. These branches of the administration had been controlled by men who had had the common feeling of giving the smallest amount of service for the largest amount of pay, and great reforms were needed. He entered upon his new work with great vigour. His feeling of the previous emptiness of his life was increasing, and he wished to do obviously altruistic work. As he came near the end of the third decade of his life this reflection oppressed him. On August 7th he wrote in his diary :

"Quiet review of my life, of the confusion, impulsiveness and perverse desires of youth, reaching out on all sides for satisfaction. How I have taken pleasure in occult, obscure, imaginative

## Goethe

things! How I only half laid hold of science, and soon let it go again! How a sort of modest self-complacency pervades all that I then wrote! How short-sighted I have been in human and divine things! How little time I gave to action, or even to sound thought and poetic composition, and how many days I wasted in sensation and a passion for shadows; and how little profit I had from them! And how, now that half my life is over, I have made no way, but stand like one whom the sun begins to dry after an escape from the water! I dare not as yet review the time I have spent in commerce with the world since October 1775. God help us to advance and give us light, that we may not stand so much in our own way, and enable us to do our duty from morning to night, to have a clear knowledge of the consequences of things, and not to be like men who complain of headache all day and take too much wine at night. May the idea of purity, which I have adopted in my diet, become brighter and brighter in me."

From that time, for five or six years, we find Goethe immersed in active work and withdrawing more and more from society. But we have to consider briefly another experience of the year 1779 before we summarise his work as a statesman.

It was quite natural that the young Duke should not keep up with Goethe in this development of character, and the divergence made Goethe uneasy. With his faith in the moral power of mountains, he proposed that they should go together to Switzerland, and the Duke consented. Some one, probably the Duke, proposed that they should first visit

182

## The Sunset of Youth

Goethe's parents at Frankfort. "Frau Aja" had quite a repute at the Weimar Court. Wieland had visited her in 1777, and brought a flattering report. The Duchess Amalia conducted a correspondence with her on almost equal terms. Goethe could not fail to be drawn closer to his mother by this current of sympathy, and it is about this time that he begins to write occasionally to her. A comparatively warm note is found for the first time in the letter in which he announces their coming. "The vines are flourishing on the hills of Samaria," he says, reminding her of the Bible promise of ten years before, and he trusts that she and his father will "receive them with open and warm hearts, and thank God who brings back their son to them in such state in his thirtieth year." It is to be the dot on the "i" of their lives. He gives her minute instructions for the furnishing of their rooms and table.

On September 12th they left Weimar, and on the 18th were at Frankfort. A letter of Frau Goethe to the Duchess Amalia gives a pleasant and touching account of the joy of the parents, when Wolf, in gold-laced coat, bursts into the familiar rooms, and the Duke looks on, smiling, from the doorway. "We no longer envy the gods their home on Olympus or their nectar and ambrosia." There was no democratic defiance in the father now, as Goethe—one gathers from his letter—feared that there might be. His mind was in decay, and he seems to have taken a childlike pleasure in the greatness of his son. They remained a few days,

## Goethe

and the Duke afterwards sent money to cover the expense they had caused. Then "Baron von Wedel" (as the Duke called himself during this tour) moved to Strassburg, and Goethe rode out alone to Sesenheim. He passed a night once more in the old parsonage, and sat with Friederike again in the arbour in which he had spent so many hours ten years before. She received him quietly and affectionately. At Strassburg he visited another of his early loves, Lili von Türckheim, whom he found playing with her baby. More living memories were stirred when, a few days afterwards, he stood by the grave of his sister at Emmendingen. Then came Switzerland, a grave talk with Lavater and a fresh bath in the solemn emotions which the mountains always evoked. They returned by way of Frankfort, again staying with Goethe's parents, and so brought to a close an enjoyable and deeply influential journey. Karl August himself was observed to be less youthful after that journey. Goethe notices it with great satisfaction; it was in the early part of that year that he had had to speak to him about his attitude to Corona Schroeter.

Goethe returned to work in a serious but happy temper. "God has richly blessed me in secret," he wrote to Lavater, "for my fate is wholly hidden from men." It was not wholly hidden, since many complaints were made of his increasing isolation. We find, however, that he still attended their dances and concerts, and saw much of Corona. In the spring he seems to have reflected that this was not consistent with his resolutions. He notes in his

184

## The Sunset of Youth

diary that "a man's vices are like tapeworms," but he is resolved "to be master." A new idea of a tragedy (the *Tasso*) has occurred to him, and he works assiduously. Again, however, he feels the egoistic character of art, and bends to his administrative work. He writes to Frau von Stein in September that he is diverting the water from the pretty cascades to the useful work of irrigation, though at times the flood is too strong for him. To Lavater (September 20th, 1780) he expresses his feeling more clearly :

"My duty becomes dearer to me every day, and I would in this, and in nothing greater, like to do as the greatest men have done. This wish to raise as high as possible the pyramid of my existence, the bases of which are already laid, dominates all other feelings, and scarcely leaves my mind for a moment. I dare not delay; I am well on in years, and fate may cut the thread at any time and leave the Babylonian tower unfinished. Men shall at least say that it was well planned."

It is, perhaps, not encouraging to find that this advancing gravity brings with it distress and almost morbid brooding. Goethe's health suffered, and his relations with others were overcast. Rival politicians spun their intrigues or sowed their calumnies. Knebel, his dearest friend in the Court, was pensioned and left in 1781 on long absence. The Herders had become very unfriendly. Herder strangely moved away from him as he became more serious, and spoke of him in his bitterest tones as

## Goethe

the Duke's "master of pleasures and comedian." Caroline was equally hostile. One suspects jealousy. Goethe buried himself more and more in the garden-house and in his duties, and his tone grew sadder. Then, in the spring of 1781, his letters are suddenly lit up once more with warm feeling, and there can be little doubt that he had at last received from Frau von Stein a confession of her love for him.

Some writers ascribe this confession of Frau von Stein to jealousy of Corona Schroeter, but it is clear that he saw less, rather than more, of that lady. One of his letters, without name or date, but apparently written in the autumn of 1781, is generally believed to have been sent to Corona, and it intimates that he has been for some time estranged from her. I am more disposed to connect the action of Frau von Stein with a visit which Goethe made in March (1781) to the country seat of the Countess von Werthern auf Neunheiligen. From Neunheiligen he sent to Frau von Stein a very glowing, though by no means amorous, description of his hostess. In a letter written a few days later he speaks of having received from Frau von Stein a message that has "given him great joy." For five years he has not used the loverly "thou" in writing to her; now it flows from his pen in every sentence :

"My soul has blended with thine—I can say nothing—thou knowest that I am inseparable from thee, and that neither height nor depth can separate me from thee. I wish there were some oath or

186



## The Sunset of Youth

sacrament that would make me one with thee visibly and legally: how I should cherish it! And my novitiate was long enough to enable me to remember it. Adieu. I can no longer write 'you,' just as for a long time I could not write 'thou.'"

Three months later he protests that they are "really married," and for some years the letters express the warmest affection. He read Spinoza and Buffon with her, and loved to carry on his person a handkerchief or ring or some other object of hers as a talisman. His Wertherism was assuredly not yet extinct.

In 1782 he undertook a more serious burden of administrative work. He had in 1779 been made actual Privy Councillor (instead of Legation Councillor), and his salary had been increased to 1400 thalers. Merck, who had visited Weimar and given him some assistance, soon tired of seeing Germany's first poet in such a yoke, and urged him to abandon office. He told Frau Goethe that her son's health was failing, and she wrote to the Duchess Amalia. Goethe firmly refused to withdraw, and, in 1782, took control of the Chamber of Finance, and, somewhat reluctantly, accepted a patent of nobility from the Emperor. Von Kalb, who had been dismissed from the Treasury for improper conduct, had left it in a state of disorder; and Goethe drew up an ambitious scheme of reform. He had already reformed the military department, reducing the Duke's little army from six hundred to three hundred men, and he had greatly improved the means of communication, and of coping with

## Goethe

such emergencies as fire and flood in the duchy. He now set his hand to a greater task: to realise his ideal that the whole duchy should flourish, instead of being a wilderness with one central garden.

The next four years were crowded with administrative work. Goethe had now become in reality the first minister, though he was not nominally President of the Council, and he was minded to make a thoroughly humane use of his power. He was not in principle a democrat: the Aristotelean ideal of government by experts for the people, but not elected by them, appealed to him. But that he was supremely bent on improving the lot of the people is clear from all the fragmentary notices of his work. Even before 1782 he had spared no pains in his work. Herder's gibe at his theatrical employment was wholly unworthy. We find him, in his letters, rushing to the scene of inundations and burning his clothes and hair as he controls the efforts of the miserable "fire brigades." We find him still doing this in 1784, but graver tasks now confront him. He would reduce expenditure, reorganise the excise, and restore the productiveness of the abandoned mines; and the surplus should be applied to the relief of taxation, the improvement of roads, a better provision for the poor, a fostering of peasant proprietorship, a scheme of irrigation and drainage, and the subsidising of Jena University.

The better to accomplish his new work he left the garden-house in October (1782), and began to live in the larger house in the town (in the Frauen-  
188

## The Sunset of Youth

plan), which the Duchess Amalia furnished for him. But the task—we may sum up the work of four years in few words—proved too formidable for him or for any minister. Karl August would not be converted to his high ideal of economy in the interest of the people. He made some concessions, but was generally grudging and hostile, and Goethe's private letters begin to speak censoriously of him. Firmer and more outspoken was the hostility of the lesser nobles who would suffer by his economies. Now that Councillor von Goethe was no longer (after 1782) the centre and the life of every entertainment, they could resent his fads and frailties. He disdainfully ignored them, and confined himself to a few friends. His love of Frau von Stein still sustained him. "My love of thee," he wrote in 1784, "is no longer a passion, but a disease—a disease that is dearer to me than the most perfect health." He was greatly attached to her son Fritz (born in 1773), and in 1783 he induced Frau von Stein to let the boy live and travel with him. In 1785 he sent him to visit Frau Goethe in Frankfort.

The struggle and the unsuccessful labour gradually wore down his spirit and his health, and he began to long for relief. In 1785 even the consolations of Frau von Stein were checked. One of Goethe's economics was to induce the Duke to discontinue the old practice of providing free table for his servants. Amongst the grumblers at this reform was Herr von Stein, who was now forced to take his meals at home. No doubt it is true that

## Goethe

this change had the effect of making Goethe realise more clearly the strangeness of his relation to Frau von Stein, but we may further assume that Herr von Stein was embittered. The horizon was again darkening on nearly every side. He was reconciled with Herder, and engaged him to bring out a complete edition of his works, but he could find neither leisure nor inspiration to complete the dramas he had begun. *Egmont* and *Iphigenia* were waiting for revision; *Tasso* was a mere fragment; *Wilhelm Meister* was slowly advancing through the fifth and sixth books; *Faust* made no progress.

In addition to all this a deeper political problem was emerging, and in the solution of it Goethe differed radically from Karl August. Prussia and Austria threatened, from north and south, to engulf the small States that lay between them. Goethe was for a friendly understanding between the small States, that each might be free to foster its internal development with all its strength. Karl August, younger, bolder, and—as events proved—more far-seeing, was for an alliance with Prussia. He felt that a unification of Germany in many respects (not politically) was desirable, and that alliance with Frederick, whom Goethe disliked and distrusted, was their best security against the rapacity of Austria. Goethe saw the cloud of world-politics now added to the menace of his plans. When Frederick forced their hands by an alliance with Saxony and Hanover, he gloomily gave way.

It is almost necessary for us to remind ourselves constantly that Goethe is still (in 1785) only in his

190

## The Sunset of Youth

thirty-sixth year. The work, anxiety and isolation have so depressed him, however, that he writes at times in the strain of an old man. He has turned the water from the cascades, and, though the waterfalls are almost silent, he sees no flowers rising in the irrigated ground. He leans to science, and is delighted to find that there is an intermaxillary bone in man, which all the anatomists deny, and that he is also on the way to make great discoveries in botany and geology.<sup>1</sup> The weariness continues, however. In the summer of 1785 he goes with Knebel, who has returned from his long voyage, to Karlsbad. Frau von Stein, Herder, and the Duchess Luise (now more friendly to Goethe) are there, and the weeks are happy. But the winter's work makes him once more pale and irritable. The Weimar atmosphere is suffocating him. He must—he said afterwards—escape or die; and the land of deliverance is Italy, which lures him like the spirit of spring. He dare not open a Roman writer for the pain it will bring on him. How poignantly he expressed his yearning in Mignon's songs in *Wilhelm Meister*!

In the following summer he goes again to Karlsbad, and spends merry weeks with the Duke and Herder and Frau von Stein. They do not know that he has brought with him provision for a long journey (the manuscripts of *Egmont*, *Iphigenia*, *Tasso*, and *Faust*), and has already written to Jacobi, who is in England: "Before you get back I shall be on the other side of the world." On

<sup>1</sup> Which will be briefly considered in a later chapter.

## Goethe

August 14th he accompanies Frau von Stein to Schneeberg. She has no suspicion that he is saying farewell for a year or two; nor does Goethe himself know that it is the last hour of tenderness they will ever know. He returns to Karlsbad, lets the Duke depart in a similar ignorance, and joins in a warm celebration of his thirty-seventh birthday. On the evening of September 2nd he writes to tell the Duke and Herder and Frau von Stein that he is going on a long journey; he will not yet say whither. And at three in the morning he stole away, like a fugitive school-boy, on the historic Italian journey.

## CHAPTER X

### THE ITALIAN JOURNEY

RARELY in the history of statesmanship has an upright and capable minister fled from his theatre of action as Goethe fled from Germany in 1786. In the darkness and silence of the September morning a post-chaise came to the door of the hotel. One man only, his servant Philip, was in the secret; he feared that the friends who slept in the hotels about him would, if they were awakened, prevent him from going. Nervously he drove out into the dark country, and clung to his coach, day and night, for thirty-one hours, until he reached Ratisbon. On the following day he set out for Munich, again passing the night in the coach. He feared to linger even in the galleries of Munich, and was off at five the next morning, speeding through the valleys of the Tyrol as if the police of Weimar were in hot pursuit. He took up on the road a wandering harper and his daughter, and spent pleasant hours talking to the pretty and ingenuous girl. At last he reached the remote solitude of the Brenner Pass, and the great snow-clad hills stood like protecting deities on every side of him. But it was not yet Italy. He resumed his strange flight on the following night, and reached Roveredo on the evening of September 11th. There he began to feel the warm breath of the South caress-

## Goethe

ing his jaded frame, and to thrill at the sound of the Italian tongue.

That charming work, *The Italian Journey*, in which Goethe tells the story of his travels, was compiled long afterwards from the diary and the letters which he had written at the time. The diary was made for Frau von Stein, from whom some writers absurdly represent him as flying, and is now published. I cannot see that much of the freshness of the diary and letters has been lost in the later narrative, and the loss is more than compensated by the beauty of composition and maturity of judgment. As, however, *The Italian Journey* is easily accessible even to the English reader, I will be content to give such parts of it as seem to be required for the purpose of a biography, with the little supplementary information provided by later research.

Goethe disguised his rank and name from the moment he quitted Karlsbad. He became Johann Philipp Möller, a German merchant travelling for pleasure. Had it been an age of photography, his face would have thwarted any attempt at disguise, but few pictures of him were in circulation at that time. One man only, on the second day of his flight, recognised him; Goethe, however, stoutly lied and said that he was not that distinguished poet. Once he had passed the Italian frontier he had the delight of mingling with all classes, especially the workers, in the most complete disguise. Indeed near the frontier he had the novel experience of having to prove, in order to avoid arrest as a spy, that he was a respectable person. He had sailed



## The Italian Journey

down Lake Garda, and been forced to put in at the village of Malsesine. A dilapidated castle, doorless and empty, stood on the hill, and he sat down inside to sketch the view. People gathered round, and at last accosted him. The dialect was not easy to follow, but when the leader of them tore up his sketch he was able to understand that they were disposed to arrest him for drawing plans of their fortress. He laboured long to convince them that the old building had a certain beauty from the artistic point of view, whereas its military importance was by no means obvious. At length they found an Italian who had been in Frankfort, and the trouble ended in southern smiles.

At Verona he saw with joy the first great monument of ancient Rome, the amphitheatre; at Vicenza he found the classical architecture of Palladio, and wrote for Frau von Stein many pages of warm admiration of its chaste and stately simplicity. Modern architects do not wholly endorse the high praise of Palladio that is found in *The Italian Journey*. They count his work an inexpressive and inelastic imitation of the antique. Goethe, however, had not yet seen the southern temples, and was enthusiastic about its strong simple lines and purity of design. It accorded with his literary mood. His earlier style had been Gothic, unrestrained, extravagantly efflorescent; he now sought the repose, dignity and simplicity which German writers affected to see in the antique.

From that moment he almost hurries past the many witnesses to medieval art which northern

## Goethe

Italy presented to him, in his eagerness to greet the actual relics of ancient Rome. He merely examines and appreciates their pictures, and studies the people with the most sympathetic and admiring interest. His work includes a unique gallery of the Italian women of the various provinces. He notes the rocks as he hurries along, and pursues his botanical speculations, especially in the garden at Padua, where a "Goethe-palm" is treasured to this day as having strongly confirmed his theory of the metamorphosis of plants. He works, in leisure hours, at his *Iphigenia*, giving it the superb classical (or Palladian) form in which we admire it to-day.

On the evening of September 28th he sailed into the lagoons of Venice, and was able to write in his diary, for the lady who was never out of his thoughts for a day: "Thank God, Venice is no longer a mere name to me." Luckily, the day was fine. I remember entering Venice on (or about) the same date for the first time, and staring with wonderment at the leaden, Thames-like canal and the grey buildings which hardly showed their pallid faces through the drizzling rain. Still, Venice was medieval, and its treasures often drew expressions of disdain from the neopagan artist. "So much has been said about Venice," he wrote, "that I will not delay with it; it was the people who interested me most." He was staying near St. Mark's, but in his book he describes the whole town without saying a word about St. Mark's and the Doge's Palace. Indeed a stranger would gather from the record of his seventeen days in Venice that, although the people and

196

## The Italian Journey

their ways were most interesting, and the artistic effect of the whole was excellent, the only churches and notable buildings in Venice were the Carita and Redentore of Palladio, and the only other treasures were a few paintings and some good copies of antique sculpture. He begins, in fact, to see "many faults" in Palladio. He will not deign to say that of St. Mark's and the Palazzo.

On October 15th he went from Venice to Ferraro by boat, sleeping in his cloak on the open deck; then on to Bologna and Perugia. One after another he made acquaintance with the great painters of Italy—Guercino, Raphael, Pietro Perugino—and venerated them, especially Raphael; though he wasted some enthusiasm on a Sta. Agatha at Bologna, which is not now ascribed to Raphael. He complained that the "stupid subjects" of the pictures everywhere interfered with his enjoyment: "Of every ten subjects nine ought not to have been chosen, and the tenth has not been considered in the right aspect." His pagan taste and his eagerness to reach Rome before anything could happen to recall him made him a curious pilgrim. The Apennines, over which he rode in the company of a grumbling Englishman "and a lady whom he called his sister," awoke all his enthusiasm, but to Florence he devoted only three hours of his time and four lines of his diary. Assisi came next, and he inspected it in his own way. He passed in disdain by the "monstrous subconstructions of churches heaped on top of each other, in Babylonian fashion, where St. Francis rests," and hurried out

## Goethe

to see the ancient temple of Minerva. So uncouth a procedure excited suspicion, and the carabineers gravely detained him. He unblushingly escaped their toils by saying that he was familiar with the church of St. Francis from an earlier visit, and, being an architect, wished now to see the old temple. The truth was that his early zeal for the simple Italian people already waned. Their ignorance and listlessness overwhelmed him. An intelligent guide asked him very seriously whether it was not true that Protestants married their sisters, and whether Frederick the Great was not a surreptitious Catholic with a special dispensation from the Pope to hear Mass only in a secret underground chapel. When he contrasted the three great memorials of ancient Rome which survived in this benighted and appallingly backward Italy—the amphitheatre at Verona, the Minerva at Assisi, and the aqueduct at Spoleto—he hurried along with contempt toward Rome. He slept in his clothes, and took the first coach southward from every place.

Biographically, as we shall see, this feeling was the most important result of Goethe's journey. It was little modified when he reached Rome, and found all the treasures of medieval art richly exposed, while the remains of the old Empire were as yet more than half buried under the rubbish of centuries. He entered the gate—the Porta del Popolo—in a state of exaltation. Until that moment he had dreaded that he would never see Rome. Now all the cold sketches of its glories that he had ever seen were transformed into thrilling

198

## The Italian Journey

realities. It was, he says, like the breathing of life into Pygmalion's statue. Here again, however, it was the fragments of antiquity that chiefly attracted him. "It is a hard and sad business," he wrote, "to disentangle the old Rome from the new. . . . What the barbarians spared, the architects of modern Rome have devastated." In the collections it was the Belvedere Apollo and a supposed Greek painting of Ganymede; in the open the broken walls on the Palatine, the Coliseo, the tombs along the Appian Way. "I greet thee from Abraham's bosom," he wrote to Knebel. He was now free to dispel the mystery he had left behind in Weimar.

In spite of his prejudice, however, the art of Raphael and Michael Angelo earned his unstinted admiration. He had brought from the north, even from Strassburg days, an appreciation of Raphael, and he studied the loggie with delight, but Michael Angelo made a deeper impression. In the Sistine Chapel, he says, "I could only stand in astonished silence." In the medieval palaces he had eyes for little more than the few pagan survivals. In the churches the gorgeous ceremonies oppressed him. Instead of reflecting on the coldness and poverty of Protestant worship, he says that the Catholic rites were "a unique spectacle in their way," but that "their ceremonies and operas, their evolutions and ballets, fell upon me like water on a duck's back," and he would rather they did not "shut out the sun of higher art and pure humanity." This was no superficial impression, for he remained four

## Goethe

months at Rome, and returned afterwards for a longer stay and deeper study.

His health had been almost restored by the journey through Italy, in spite of its hurriedness. As he soon found a congenial and deeply admiring circle in Rome, he entirely recovered his spirits. Before leaving Germany he had been in correspondence with the painter Tischbein, who was only two years short of his own age, a cheerful and brotherly artist. When he met Tischbein, and told him that he wanted a quiet room, and would avoid hotels, he was invited to stay in the house (No. 18 in the Corso—since rebuilt) where Tischbein and another artist lived. It was kept by a coachman and his wife. Artists gathered there, and “Filippo Miller” was introduced. They soon had an inner circle of finely cultured men—the Swiss archæologist Hirt, the Swiss painter Meyer, who would become in later years a close associate, the young Privy Councillor von Reiffenstein, and the somewhat Wertherish but very accomplished writer Karl Philipp Moritz. In the course of time the group came to include the beautiful and accomplished Swiss painter Angelica Kauffmann, then in her forty-sixth year, as tender and wise as she was charming, and her husband the painter Zucchi.

In such company, amid such surroundings, and with a mild and bright winter, Goethe wholly recovered his old self, and deeply attached his companions. At first an attempt was made to preserve his disguise, but he soon allowed his identity to be known. Under their guidance he explored Rome;

## The Italian Journey

and he would sit with them at nights in endless discourse on art, or make with them excursions to Frascati or to the sea, or read his *Iphigenia*, which was finished in January, to them. The younger men were clearly disappointed; they had expected another *Götz*. But the warm applause of the better judges, especially of Angelica Kauffmann, contented him. Others joined the merry group—especially a young Englishman Bury and the German landscape painter Schütz—and the days passed in pleasant industry and goodfellowship.

Suddenly, during his second month in Rome, a thunderbolt crashed into his genial world. He was writing a letter to Frau von Stein when the post brought him one from her. He opened it with the liveliest joy. He had shared his pleasure with her from the start, and sent off to her from Venice the first part of his diary, that she might be the first to know his destination and affectionately follow his course. To his intense astonishment and pain her letter was a bitter reproach for his desertion and a sharp dismissal from her heart. The message from Venice had not reached her; she had had to learn from Karl August and Knebel, to whom he had at once written from Rome, where he was. Unable to understand what had happened, he at first accepted the dismissal. "So that is all you have to say to a friend, a lover, who has yearned so long for a good word from you. . . . I cannot tell thee how thy note has torn my heart. Farewell, unique being, and harden not thy heart against me" (December 9th). The Duke and his other friends had written

## Goethe

most cordially to forgive his deception and wish him well.

After a few days of dismal brooding it occurred to him that the packet might not have reached her from Venice, and he wrote again. We have not Frau von Stein's letters to him, as she demanded them back after the rupture and, presumably, destroyed them, but they are sufficiently reflected in his. In the middle of January we find him writing that he has a friendly letter from her, and the warmth returns to his narrative. From that time, however, we may trace the slow sinking of his passion, the turn of the rocket. It was not due so much to the sharp outburst into which she had been betrayed, as to the gradual change in his ideals and tastes. One thing that he admired in Rome, he said, was the free sensuousness of life and art, and, as the feeling grew in him, he departed from the mood in which he could entertain a passion for Frau von Stein. He remained in Rome until the carnival, which disgusted him, and then left for Naples with Tischbein, who had already begun to paint the familiar picture of Goethe sitting amidst the ruins of the Campagna. Shades were beginning to appear in the bright life of Rome. Every social circle, even of the artistic world, had its cliques and controversies, and Goethe was impatient of them. Let us be absorbed in what is enduring, he said, and disdain the passing interests of a year or a decade.

When he reached Naples, on February 25th, the glorious bay and the stirring life of the great city





*Photo by]*

GOETHE IN 1787

From the Painting by Tischbein

*[L. Held, Wernau*

## The Italian Journey

changed his mood once more. Antiquity was almost forgotten in what he called the splendid spectacle of living nature and humanity. He had been accustomed, apart from a brief and contemptuous visit to Berlin, to the small towns of Germany. Venice, Rome, and Naples (which even then had nearly half a million inhabitants), had for him the fascination which London has for some new-comer from a sleepy town like Bedford, with the added gaiety and colour of southern life. Most visitors contrive to love Naples by moving away until it becomes an indistinguishable hive, standing, not without picturesqueness, on the silver-bordered crescent of the coast, with the superb blue bay to the west and the soft green hills to the east. Goethe echoed the claim of the people that it was "paradise," and listened genially to their description of the north as "the land of perpetual snow, wooden houses, *great ignorance*, and plenty of money." On one occasion, he says, "the tears almost stood in the eyes of the poor northerner," as he surveyed the beautiful scene from one of the hills. His young guide had suddenly slapped him on the shoulder, and, when Goethe turned round in astonishment, the youth murmured: "Pardon, signore, that is my country."

But Goethe insists that Naples itself and the people of Naples are a "splendid spectacle." His book contains the most singular championship of Naples that has ever been written; and he not only spent seven weeks in the city, but explored it in every stratum with the most searching eyes. He reads in his excellent guide-book, by Volckmann,

## Goethe

that there are fifty thousand beggars in it, and that the people are phenomenally idle. He goes out to search for these idlers and beggars, and cannot find them, even when he inquires! The Neapolitans are a splendid, active, spirited people. He describes the workers, class by class, with the minutest knowledge, and gives them the strangest praise they have ever had from a foreigner. You must, however, he says in the end, not judge them by the police standards of northern morality.

The upper class he admires as much as the lower. Here is again an artistic colony, and Tischbein secures entry. In time his circle widens, and he visits the Italian nobility. One lively young lady made a warm impression. He was visiting friends when he met her, and she promptly and uncereemoniously invited him to dinner. He learned with surprise that she was a princess. He followed up the strange adventure with some scepticism, but the coachman took him to an imposing palace, and presently the mysterious princess eagerly welcomed him. She made him sit by her at dinner, and, for his entertainment, tormented and ridiculed throughout the dinner the priests who sat opposite. In the end she pressed him to visit her in her estate at Sorrento, where she and Sorrento would "cure him of all his philosophy." He learned afterwards that she was married to an elderly noble, and, although quite correct in conduct, sought relief in constant gibes at religion and morality. When the wall of her house had nearly fallen on her during an earthquake in Cababria a few years before, she had

## The Italian Journey

merrily turned to it and reproached it for its "immoral" intentions.

He made many visits to the house of the English envoy Sir W. Hamilton, "the friend of art and of ladies," and it is curious to read his impression of "the beautiful young Englishwoman of twenty" who would a few years later captivate Nelson. He thought her rather singular than attractive. Her shawl-dance, for which Sir William held the lamp, bewildered him. For Hamilton and his art treasures he had great regard. Hamilton was not yet married to the beautiful adventuress, and she was five or six years older than Goethe imagined.

"In Rome you study : at Naples you merely live," he wrote to Weimar. The five weeks of his first stay in Naples and the fortnight he spent there on his return from Sicily were the most enjoyable of his tour. He did not forget antiquity. He visited Pompeii twice and Herculaneum and Pæstum; and his scientific interests were indulged by three visits to Vesuvius, much search for the ideal plant, and great delight in the animal wealth of the bay. But education in the narrower sense was put in the second place; he learned to enjoy life once more. As his princess did not go to Sorrento until after his departure, it is probable that he did not visit that glorious headland or cross to the island of Capri, but he made excursions to Pozzuoli and Posilippo.

The spring was creeping upward from the south, and he decided to go down to meet it. Tischbein had to return to Rome, but he found another artist-companion, Kniep, and they set sail on March 29th.

## Goethe

The four days' passage was not smooth, and Goethe did not enjoy his first close acquaintance with the sea. It must, surely, be a record in the history of literature that he used those four days, lying on a mattress in the gloomy cabin, unable to take anything but bread and wine, to compose his *Tasso*. He had brought with him the two acts he had written at Weimar, and he now thought out the rest of the plot.

At Palermo he fell into conversation with a Maltese who had been in Thuringia. The Maltese asked news of "the man—at that time a lively young fellow—who was responsible for the weather at Weimar." "I forget his name," he added, "but he was the author of *Werther*." Goethe confessed that he was the man. "Indeed," said the Maltese; "you must have greatly changed." "Yes," Goethe answered, "between Weimar and Palermo I have undergone many changes." The six weeks' stay in Sicily strongly confirmed the change. It is impossible even to summarise here the fine account of his travels, and we must be content to indicate the permanent results. They are told in his letters to Frau von Stein, and the further course of his story confirms his impressions.

The first conclusion he notes is that "the more he sees of the world, the more he is convinced that mankind can never be one wise, judicious, and happy mass." This feeling is likely to be misunderstood; it is only a few weeks later that he writes his remarkable eulogy of the common people of Naples. His meaning is that the close inter-

206

## The Italian Journey

course with the unlettered millions of Italy convinces him that they are children, and must be governed by benevolent despots. It is the attitude he will take in face of the French Revolution. The second and most important effect, as far as his character is concerned, comes of this six weeks' enjoyment of Nature in the fairest garb which he has ever seen her wear. Never before had earth been so lavishly strewn with flowers. He had been moving away from Nature, and slighting the appeals of sense, during the last few years at Weimar. Now she, in her Sicilian garb, wins him back, and makes his senses tingle with new life. And, thirdly, lest the new sensuousness should express itself in a fresh impatience of literary restraint, he is again confronted with the classical ideal of the expression of beauty. He studies the ruined temple at Segesta, the four crumbling temples at Girgenti, and the amphitheatre at Taormina. He is so carried back to old times that he sits down and plans a Greek tragedy, *Nausicaa*, and determines that he will write as Homer did: objectively, simply, and sincerely. The old pagan world asserted its supremacy. Here was a glorious province of the earth; here were the imperishable proofs that the Greeks and Romans had appreciated it; and here now was a miserable people deriving no artistic inspiration whatever from its wonderful beauty.

The return voyage to Naples was stormy; the ship was almost driven on to the rocks, while Goethe lay dreamily conscious of the danger below. But "incomparable Naples" restored his spirits, and he

## Goethe

concluded the observations which I have already given. A lady asked him to meet an English admirer. "Six months ago," he says, "I should have refused; that I consented shows the happy effect of my Sicilian journey." On June 3rd he bade farewell to the generous friends and the superb country that he could never hope to see again, and set out for Rome. Here again I must select from his work (*The Second Stay in Rome*) and letters the general ideas and the few details that are of biographical significance.

He had written to Weimar that he would set his face northward in July, but that resolution melted quickly when he returned to the artistic colony at Rome. They clung to him with great affection, and made his stay happy and useful. Tischbein had to leave, and the young Swiss painter Meyer—who had "an English goodness of heart"—became his closest friend among the men. Angelica Kauffmann, however, had the greatest influence over him. He spent every Sunday with her, and the endless praise of her beauty and skill and goodness which he admits in his letters must have disquieted Frau von Stein. She painted Goethe—not successfully—and Trippel made an heroic bust of him. Fifteen months of assiduous study in this colony of painters, sculptors, and scholars gave him a thorough knowledge of Rome. Indeed he so far lost himself in their world that he seriously took up the study of drawing. After two months' hard work, however, he realised that he was wasting glorious days on very poor sketches, while such masterpieces as *Faust*

208

## The Italian Journey

and *Tasso* lay unfinished in his trunk. For a time, then, he tried sculpture. By the beginning of November he candidly confessed to himself that he was "too old" to begin work in the plastic arts, and he settled down with energy and fertility to the completion of his plays.

To protect the industry which filled his second stay at Rome he made a vow that he would not look on woman. In October, however, he was exposed to temptation, and the vow at once showed its frailty. The English banker Jenkins invited him and many others to spend some days in a villa at Castel Gandolfo. The company was large and, he said, the life was as gay and varied as at a watering-place. On one occasion, when they played some gambling game, he sat between two beautiful young women, a brunette from Rome and a blonde from Milan. He divided his attentions, until the mother of the pretty Roman told him that Italian etiquette did not admit such a division. He then drew nearer to the Milanese lady, with tender skin and blue eyes, gave her lessons in English, and evidently lost his heart to her. Unluckily, he learned that she was betrothed, and the fair gardens and country became gloomy and repellent to him. He also had the misfortune to offend his host by gathering mushrooms during his walk, and getting the cook to serve them. Probably Jenkins merely distrusted Goethe's ability to distinguish mushrooms from poisonous fungi.

He returned to hard work in Rome, alternating with visits to galleries and unending discussion.



## Goethe

On one occasion, he says, a group of the artists had been visiting the Sistine Chapel, and came away in hot discussion. They crossed the river by a ferry, and were to part on the other bank. As the argument was so little advanced, however, they decided to remain on the boat, and bade the man ply backward and forward. He at last realised the monetary value of their folly, and rowed from bank to bank. When his son asked the meaning of it, he said: "I don't know, but they are mad." On another occasion they took Goethe through the Vatican gallery by torchlight. Concerts and other entertainments helped to fill the evenings, and the winter sped rapidly.

Two things, besides the approach of Easter, ruffled the even and pleasant flow of his life. His enthusiastic letters had carried an Italian fever to Weimar, and the Duchess Amalia and Herder decided to follow him. The Duchess intended to come at once and join him. He prudently advised her to wait until the spring made Italy attractive; to us he admits that the change of company was unwelcome to him. His point is wrongly put by some of the chief biographers, and is important. He does not say that he disliked the idea of being *cicerone*, but that he should find Weimar company irksome after that of the artists. "I had," he says, "endeavoured since the previous year to rid myself of the chimerical fancies and ways of thinking of the north, and had grown accustomed to look about me and breathe more freely under the blue vault of heaven." This is an important clue to his conduct when he returns to Weimar.

## The Italian Journey

The other disturbing thought was that he learned that the Milanese beauty had been jilted, and was seriously ill. Recent Italian writers, following up Goethe's statement that she was a sister to a clerk in Jenkins's bank, assure us that her name was Maddalena Riggi, and that she was in her twenty-third year. Goethe followed her illness with grave concern. She recovered, and became an intimate friend of Angelica Kauffmann, but Goethe did not visit her until the time of departure drew near. He heard that a young Roman was paying attention to her, and he must have reflected that he had no marriage to offer her. Some days before his departure, he went to her house and they talked a little. His coachman was not to be found when he returned to the street, and he called to Maddalena, who was at the window: "You see they are unwilling to take me from you." The spark kindled the flame they had both wished to leave unkindled. For a few moments, in that singular situation, they told their love to each other, then parted for ever.

The last weeks were spent in saying farewell to the beautiful things which he would never see again. What a measure it is of the progress we have made in one hundred and fifty years to find that, near the close of the eighteenth century, one of the greatest lovers of Italy, not without resources, and still young, must reconcile himself to the thought that he cannot see it twice in a lifetime! Easter-week and its rich ceremonies came, and Goethe followed the Catholic ritual with more appreciation. He now had with him the musician Kayser, who had come

## Goethe

to Rome to compose some of Goethe's operas, and he was enabled to see that much of the music was great art, finely executed; though he still notes that it has "no effect whatever" on his religious feelings. Then there were the last solitary walks over Rome, the last luxurious and mournful contemplation of all that he thought grandest on earth. He strolled alone in the moonlight one night to the Capitol, and, as he gazed sadly on the softly-lit monuments, Ovid's beautiful farewell to Rome rose tenderly to his lips. On April 22nd, to the deep grief of his artist friends, some of whom wept as they said farewell, he left Rome—for ever.

The rest of the Italian journey is only scantily gathered from one or two letters. Florence was the chief city he had still to visit, and he was now in better mood to appreciate its art. Some genial hours were spent composing *Tasso* in its quickening atmosphere. He was at Milan before the end of May, and wrote from there to the Duke to say that he felt the parting from Rome, but was "otherwise a contented soul." Admirers of the Milan cathedral will prefer to think that the discontent was greater than he said. He counted it the waste of "a mountain of marble," the stone of which was "daily tortured" by the "utterly tasteless forms" into which it had been shaped. Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper" was, on the other hand, pronounced "the keystone in the artistic vault." He was, in reality, greatly distressed at the loss of his loved circle in Rome. To Knebel he wrote that he was endeavouring by the study of geology "to drive away the

## The Italian Journey

bitterness of 'death.'" He reached Constance on June 3rd, and found some alleviation in the company of his Zurich friend Barbara Schulthess. Then the great hills were traversed once more, and he reached Weimar, at ten in the evening, on June 18th. His friends were soon to learn the meaning of the many hints he had given them of a change in his character.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE NEW GOETHE

IN his later letters from Italy Goethe repeatedly assured his friends that he had been born again, and was a new man. No doubt these phrases have led some writers to speak of his "conversion" during or after the Italian journey, but this is far more misleading even than the discovery of a conversion before he went to Italy. He came back more hostile than ever to the prevailing religion, if not less religious than at any other period of his life, and less disposed to respect the prevailing code of morals. The new birth meant, on the artistic side, a recovery of his fertility and a clearer perception of the ideal; on the human side, a recovery of health, sensuous enjoyment, and warm contact with nature. He had, he told the Duke, sought and found two things: the cure of his moral and physical evils and the true principles of art.

Karl August was the first to learn what he meant by his new birth. Goethe had written to him in March to ask that he might be relieved of administrative work. "I have," he said, "found myself again in this year and a half of solitude; but in what character? As artist. Whatever else I may be you shall decide, and use me. . . . Receive me as a guest, and let me, by your side, round out the

## The New Goethe

fulness of my being and enjoy life." He proposed to be the Tasso to the Duke of Ferrara, but would give political counsel when it was sought. Since Weimar was not a rich duchy, it was a large request. Karl August, however, generously consented. Henceforth the artist was to be the guest and adornment of his Court. A seat was reserved for him on the Council and in the Chamber, whenever he cared to attend, but the only Court duty assigned to him was the congenial direction of the institutes of science and art. He was free to complete the works which awaited his attention, and, resuming his little garden-house in the park, he gave himself to literary production. What he meant by his discovery of the true principles of art we shall see later.

It is with the change in Goethe the man that we are chiefly concerned. We can best define it by recalling that he had, during his first decade at Weimar, swung from one moral extreme to the other. The lusty youth had turned into an ascetic, frugal, unsociable man, a recluse despising the world and the flesh. He now returned to a healthy mean. Nature was divine, the human body glorious: the senses were the appointed gates to admit happiness to the heart: asceticism was a sickly growth of the cloister or the study. The philosophy he had come to cherish before he left Weimar was the "chimerical fancy" of an anæmic, nerve-worn man. Now he was in superb health; his cheeks were rounded and browned, his eyes full of fire, his large chest powerfully expanded. He had what

## Goethe

he would call the calm strength of the pagan; there must be neither a hectic "lusty time" nor a pallid austerity. This mood, differing from both moods in which Weimar had known him, puzzled his friends and had unexpected sequels.

At first there were cheerful days of welcome and of telling with living tongue the story of his travels. Very soon, however, his friends began to complain that he was colder and less sociable than they had expected to find him. Probably he was. It is curious that no writer, in explaining this comparative estrangement, recalls the words in which he confesses that he did not want Weimar friends at Rome. Their small talk bored him, fresh as he was from one of the most finely cultured circles in "the finest city of the world." He had, in a sense, to learn the German language over again. It was at this time that Schiller first saw him, and pronounced him conceited; he was willing to give and to patronise, but not to receive. The decisive answer to this charge is that Goethe was just then pining for the men—Meyer, Moritz and Tischbein—who could give him something, and was disquieted by the transplantation from the cultural metropolis of Europe to a little town where he alone could give. I do not care to complicate his mood, but it is necessary to add that he came home to find that his friend Merck was on the verge of bankruptcy and collapse.

Frau von Stein at once perceived the change, and gave it a personal meaning. Goethe afterwards threw the blame of this early coldness on her, but

## The New Goethe

we know that she was right. He was a new man. He had discarded the "northern way of thinking"; but that way of thinking was absolutely necessary to keep alive a passion for a woman of forty-six who made no appeal to his senses. She had not the redeeming qualities of Angelica Kauffmann. The soil in which his love had flourished had been removed, and it had withered almost unperceived. A few cool letters passed between them, and at the end of July Frau von Stein went to her house at Kochberg. Little suspecting that she had a rival in Weimar, she made one more effort to recover him. She invited him, in August, to come to Kochberg. He replied (in the hottest month of the year) that it was too cold; he dare not leave the fireside. In September he relented, but he took with him her son Fritz and Frau Herder. It was then, we shall see, that he first met Schiller. The long silence, broken only by a few bickering letters, that followed his visit sufficiently showed her failure. In February he writes to her: "I will await thee to-night. Let us amicably unite in pain and happiness so that we may enjoy our few days of life." But shortly afterwards the last chapter of their love was closed very abruptly.

Fritz von Stein, her eldest son, either lived at Goethe's house after his return to Weimar or visited it freely. One day in March the boy was surprised to find in it, with the air of being at home, a strange young woman of ripe healthy cheeks and rounded figure. He told mamma of the apparition, and she soon learned that Goethe had had a mistress



## Goethe

for the last six months. She went to Ems, leaving a letter in which, apparently, she challenged him to choose between her and the girl. He replied, not very happily, with complaints of her conduct, and proposed to share his love between the two. "Help me," he said, "to keep on its present footing this relation which annoys thee, and to prevent it from degenerating." The plain meaning of this is that this new relation is merely sexual, and robs her of nothing that he had given her. Frau von Stein was not the woman to accept such a division, still less to take the heroic course which Mme. de Warens took with Rousseau. Her mind, indeed, was clear and cold enough to see that his love of her was dead. She made no reply. We can hardly quarrel with Goethe, except for his ungenerous reproach of her. When love is to be declared, the man speaks, the woman betrays her feeling; when love is to be buried, the man betrays its death, the woman speaks.

They were reconciled some years afterwards, and became cordial friends. That Frau von Stein should never be able to forgive the woman who, she believed, had come between them we can understand without introducing, as Lewes does, "the relentless venom of ignoble minds." Frau von Stein an ignoble woman! Lewes seems to be strangely misinformed as to their relations after 1803, and his appreciation of Frau von Stein's character is lamentable.

The new figure in the gallery of Goethe's loves takes us back to the weeks immediately following his return. He tried by absorption in literary work

## The New Goethe

to relieve the isolation in which he found himself at Weimar. *Tasso*, *Faust*, and *Wilhelm Meister* were to be completed before he could entertain new creations in accord with his new spirit. He found it difficult even to complete *Tasso* alone. The memory of the "free sensuous life" of Italy haunted him. The phrase must not be understood in too narrow a sense; sometimes he calls it a "sensuous-spiritual life." He means that mind and sense, reconciled by art, are to run harmoniously, not to drag in opposite directions like the steeds in Plato's ascetic allegory.

One day, probably early in July, a young woman approached him with a petition as he walked in the park. Her brother, a Jena student, who had lost his position as private secretary, sought Privy Councillor von Goethe's influence. The fact that he sent his sister gives some support to an uncertain rumour that Goethe had previously seen and admired her in Bertuch's artificial-flower factory, where she worked. However that may be, Goethe was more interested in the bearer than the petition. She was a rich, fresh, full-bodied young woman of twenty-three,<sup>1</sup> of graceful figure, with round rosy face and fine dark hair, curved red lips, and easy engaging manner: a warm-blooded brunette in her ripest days. Her father, a petty clerk in the Recorder's office at Weimar, had brought great distress on his family by drunkenness, and had died two years before; her mother had died in the

<sup>1</sup> She was born on June 1st, 1765 (not in August 1764, as Heinemann says). See L. Geiger's *Goethe und die Seinen*, 1908.

## Goethe

girl's childhood. At the moment she lived with an aunt and sister, and worked in the factory. This was the one whom the greatest artist of his age, after passing through a throng of wise and beautiful women, was to marry.

The details of that singular courtship are left to our imagination, and are not difficult to conceive. In the *Roman Elegies*, which contain his early love, the poet soothes her for some fancied remorse that she yielded to him so readily. He afterwards dated his relation to Christiane Vulpius from July 13th. This must mean that she became his mistress less than a month after his return, and nearly two months before he visited Frau von Stein at Kochberg. Since Frau von Stein learned nothing of the liaison for months, it is clear that he did not take Christiane into his house for a long time. The *Roman Elegies*, if we care to trust a poem, suggest that she visited his house stealthily after dark, and depict him feverishly looking out for her. Possibly she went to live at the garden-house in the summer of 1789. In November, when she was within a month of child-birth, he installed her, with her aunt and sister, in his new home in the town. He did not marry her until fifteen years afterwards.

This action of Goethe has inspired many pages of casuistry. Since he himself insisted, some years afterwards, that it was a "real marriage" he had contracted, German writers are accustomed to speak of it as a "conscience marriage," and to say, as even his mother did, that he transgressed only in form. Excuses for this formal transgression are



*Photo by]*

CHRISTIANE VULPIUS  
From a Drawing by F Bury

*[L Hela, Weimar.*

## The New Goethe

then sought in his uneasiness at the time and other disturbing circumstances. It seems to me absurd to quarrel with Goethe's action and say not a word about his principles. He acted in strict conformity with his own principles, and can hardly be judged by those of other men. Whatever he may have said about marriage in later years, he admitted no sacrament of matrimony, and no law restricting love to wedded people, in 1788 or for many years after. The paganism he had brought from Italy is the simple key to his conduct. In the Roman world it had been no more immoral to have a concubine, as distinguished from a temporary mistress, than to have a wife. Marcus Aurelius himself had chosen one; and Church Councils had sanctioned such unions. Goethe, feeling himself more akin to the ancient Romans than to contemporary Christians, followed their moral code. If excuses are to be made, they must be made for his principles.

The truth is that two different aspects of his action are generally confused. The most curious instance of this confusion is that we find Lewes, who was living with George Eliot at the time when he wrote, enlarging sternly on this "dark episode" in Goethe's career. The only perceptible ground for his sternness is the wide æsthetic gulf between George Eliot and Christiane Vulpius. That was the general feeling at Weimar. Perfumed breaches of the moral law did not disturb any one at a Court where the Duchess could plead with an actress to take her place in the Duke's bed. Karl August smiled at the whim. We find Goethe lightly telling

## Goethe

him that Meyer is painting "the portrait of my family, which is not exactly a holy family," and that "the virtue of corresponding is as alien to me as the other Christian virtues." Ecclesiastical Superintendent Herder, who was arranging to go to Italy with (and at the expense of) the Catholic Bishop Dalberg and his mistress, raised no objection. Two years afterwards (September 11th, 1790) we find Goethe writing to him from another district: "I shall not be really happy until I am able to sup with you and sleep with my girl." It gives point to Goethe's flippant remark in Italy on the German clergy, when he was asked whether they curbed the amorous tendencies of their flocks. "Our priests," he said, "are too judicious to notice such trifles." Even Caroline Herder did not quarrel with Goethe until, a few years later, he refused to get for her some money that she wanted from the Duke. In a word, Weimar resented only the vulgarity of the liaison. If Goethe had continued only to see Christiane after dark, they would have smiled; if he had married her, they would have passed from disapproval to scandal.

Against this view, that Christiane was frankly a concubine, such as Roman patricians commonly chose among women of a lower condition, we have the claim of Lewes and other biographers that she was a "real wife" and respected companion of the poet. It is true that Goethe writes in some of his letters that he "loves her passionately," but it is very misleading to take these few expressions out of their broad context. The keynote, the most

## The New Goethe

familiar expression, of Goethe's letters to her is "My child." His attitude is totally different from his attitude toward any other woman he had ever loved. His letters are full of domestic chatter and such news as may interest a child or one who is as ignorant as a child. He promises her presents whenever he is away, and warns her not to "make eyes" at young men. If a book has to be sent to him, he tells her to ask her brother to find it in his library. Nor can we easily conceive any other relation between them, when we examine her letters to him in their original form. Not only in spelling and grammar, but in sentiment, they suggest a woman who is irremediably below any other woman with whom he had ever corresponded. Bielschowsky rightly observes that his letters to her are pathetic in their revelation of the gulf that lies between them, and that, when he speaks of his passion for her, he over-values his feeling. Other writers (Lewes, Heinemann, Geiger, etc.) plead that we should recognise a higher bond, but Goethe's own words forbid us to do so. In proposing, as we saw, to divide his affections between Frau von Stein and Christiane, he sharply characterised his relation to her. "Who else," he asked Frau von Stein, "will claim the sensations that I bestow on the poor creature?" She was his concubine, and, although the unbending hostility to her of the Weimar ladies and the implied censure on his judgment impelled him at times to use more tender language, his concubine she remained.

The sound defence of Goethe's action is that,

## Goethe

while he had no intention of marrying the girl, he made it a point of personal honour to give her that security which the legal form of wedlock would give. She was not to be the mere mistress of a summer's day. It must have been apparent to him before long that he had committed a serious blunder. I have read the letters in which he tells her how dear she is, and how he longs to be at home with her. They are quite consistent with my view, and are modified by other letters in which he betrays the concern she gives him. But he retained her in his house, maintained her family to keep her company, and endeavoured to ward from her the poisoned shafts of the ladies of Weimar. When at length their son approached manhood, when advancing years and the heaving of the political soil of Germany compelled him to reflect on their future, he married her in order to give them full legal security.

But we may deny that there was any link of intellectual interest or higher emotion without for a moment questioning that Christiane Vulpius at first brought warmth and colour into Goethe's lonely life. The power that drew him to her was not less imperious than that sympathy of soul which had drawn him to others. The brightening of his nature is richly reflected in the *Roman Elegies*, which he then wrote. When this work was first printed, it bore the address: "Rome, 1788." All writers acknowledge that it was not written in 1788,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In view of his express statement to Göschen, we must think that it was partly written in Rome.



## The New Goethe

though some strangely refuse to recognise Christiane in the tenderly, voluptuously drawn figure of a loved woman. She is depicted, just as we know her, in nearly every stanza : described as she accosts him in the park on the first day of his love-making, and as she lies asleep on the couch as Goethe drew her in a surviving sketch. But she is so intimately woven into the old Roman fabric of the poem that she might well be the Syrian favourite in some garden on the Pincian Hill. The warmth pervades his verse, saving it from the cold classicism which his Palladian ideal threatened. The *Roman Elegies* are, says Professor Herford, "reliefs carved in ivory and glowing in mellow sunlight." It is the light of a living love as well as the light of Italy.

In the meantime Goethe had, as we saw, completed two of his earlier designs, *Tasso* and *Egmont*. Some writers are too prompt to recognise a "classical phase" in the works which he published after his return from Italy. The classical ideal had been before his eyes since the early days when Oeser and Herder had guided his uncertain steps toward the kingdom of art, and he had never long lost sight of it. The *Iphigenia*, one of his most severely classical dramas, had been completed before the message of Italy had fallen articulately upon his ear; the *Egmont*, which was written, for the greater part, during his second stay at Rome, is not classical. Yet we do trace the influence of the ancient standards, as he conceived them, on his art at that time. It had been one thing to study draw-

## Goethe

ings of the ancient monuments and plaster casts of ancient statues; it was another thing to see the marble columns themselves in the dust of Italy and the carved stone of the Greek and Roman sculptors. It gave more definite form and firmer substance to his idea of the classical virtues. Henceforward he will be severely simple, avoid Gothic superfluities, and depict things beautiful rather than depict things beautifully. So he defines his new ideal.

*Egmont* belongs so wholly in idea and feeling to his earlier period that it shows his development only in its finer diction. It is a tragedy in prose, dealing with the revolt of the Netherlands in 1568. Goethe had designed it in 1775, when he entertained democratic sentiments. Its hero, Egmont, who was executed by the Duke of Alva, was a noble in sympathy with the oppressed people, yet in no overt rebellion: a milder, less vigorous, and less decided Götz, a strong warrior weakened by an infusion of Goethe's own character. As a result, although he wins sympathy, he fails in dramatic interest. It is, however, foolish to criticise the tragedy from the spectacular point of view, or to set it in contrast to Shakespeare's historical tragedies. Shakespeare wrote directly and conscientiously for the stage; Goethe refused to take account of its requirements. At that time the Weimar theatre was occupied by a troupe for which he would not dream of writing a great play; indeed, to the end of his life (as the prologue to *Faust* indicates) he resented the restrictions which stage performance would impose on his

## The New Goethe

creativeness, and clung to literary standards. *Egmont* was written to be included in the new edition of his collected works. From that point of view it is one of his great creations, and its chief female character, Klärchen, the lover of Egmont, is one of the finest in Goethe's rich gallery of women types.

In *Tasso* once more we find him spending all the resources of his art in delineating fine types of women and ignoring all the demands of the *played* drama. The poet Tasso had been familiar to him from boyhood. He had found the *Jerusalem Delivered* in his father's library, and when he, in addition to other coincidences with the Italian poet, found himself at last at the court of a prince, it occurred to him to fuse the two experiences. Tasso is, inevitably, Goethe himself; though, with a strange resolution to which he adhered in all the plays in which he put himself, he gave to his counterpart a larger share of his weaknesses than of his strength. It is a play frankly depicting Goethe at the Weimar Court: Karl August, Frau von Stein, and others at once recognised themselves when it was performed. Here, much more than in the case of *Egmont*, one must dismiss theatrical standards entirely from one's mind. It is purely literary art and supreme art. The delicate characterisation, the exalted sentiment, and the superb diction place it amongst the first of Goethe's literary dramatic works.

It is in the minor poems of 1789 that we perceive most clearly the feeling which Christiane enkindled

## Goethe

in Goethe. I need only say that the note is so purely erotic that two out of the three known poems were excluded from the edition of his collected works, at the instance, it is thought, of Caroline Herder. One has, indeed, only to glance at the chronicle of Goethe's productions to recognise the measure of Christiane's influence on him. *Tasso* and *Egmont* were finished in Italy, and show that his inspiration was once more vivid and his technique enormously improved at that time. But from the year of his return to Weimar until, in 1795, he received the splendid stimulus of Schiller's intimacy, he produced not a single work of artistic distinction, except the erotic *Roman Elegies*, in which we see the afterglow of Italy. Scientific investigations, which we will consider later, and long journeys filled those seven or eight years. His inspiration sank pitifully after 1788.

In November 1789 he had left his house in the Frauenplan to occupy the Duke's Jägerhaus (where he had lived in 1776), and he now brought Christiane and her sister and aunt to live with him. They occupied rooms in the rear of the house. His son August was born on December 25th of that year, and a new tenderness came into his life. Throughout his life Goethe loved children and exercised a kind of fascination over them. But the chatter of Weimar and Jena must have penetrated his sanctuary and disturbed his happiness. There can be little doubt that he had miscalculated, or entirely failed to calculate, the effect of his action. Herder almost alone received his confidences sympathetic-

228

## The New Goethe

ally, and Herder had gone to Italy. The women were merciless. The drunken end of Christiane's father and the simple peasant girl's tastes were disdainfully discussed. A story—probably a false story—found currency in Weimar after a time that the Duchess Luise had given orders that “the bastard” was not to be borne past her windows by the nurse.

With this irritating chatter, rather than with any cooling of his love of Christiane, I would connect his journey to Venice in March. It is not correctly said sometimes that he was forced to go, and that he tore himself from Christiane with difficulty. He had, it is true, made a light promise to the Duchess Amalia that he would meet her in Italy, but there was nothing in the nature of a serious obligation. He left on March 10th, long before it was necessary, and went by Innspruch and Verona to Venice. Italy now found him in a very different mood. It was a hard-dying winter, and as late as April 2nd snow fell upon the Piazza and spread a dismal veil over the canals. The hotel to which he had been directed was uncongenial; Duchess Amalia sent no message; the slush and cold of the streets seemed worse than at Weimar. We must assign a large part of this irritation to the weather. He came back into a land which his fallacious memory represented as ever sunlit, and found it pallid and shivering. But the ease with which external circumstances chilled what so many writers regard as the fiery love within him must seem surprising, unless we think that the flame already drooped.

## Goethe

During the month in which he waited for the Duchess his letters were full of evil humour. We have no letters addressed to Christiane, though we may assume that he wrote many. To the Duke he recommended "the little creature in the corners of my house," and expressed his new disdain of Italy. Venice was "St. Mark's in the Filth": the Italians "lived the life of hogs." Two years before he had praised Naples as no other traveller had ever done; now he lashes Venice with equal exaggeration. The *Venetian Epigrams* which he wrote, for the most part, at Venice, are a strange mixture of erotic thrill and human bitterness. Probably many of them had been written before he left Weimar; indeed some of the glowing verses on Christiane imply that their child is not yet born. We may also assume that the verses in which, for the first time, he begins to notice the French Revolution are not an outcome of the few weeks in Venice. The epigrams seem to embody two moods: the early beatific joy of possessing Christiane, and the later reaction, accentuated by the uncongenial stay at Venice. He scourges the poor and the rich, the traders and politicians, of Venice, and seems to look round the world for satirical material. It is unfortunate for his scientific repute that some of his bitter verses are directed against Sir Isaac Newton's theory of colour.

The Duchess arrived at the beginning of May, and his evil mood was laid aside, for she had in her train two of his Roman friends, Bury and Meyer. They spent the brighter weeks of May in

## The New Goethe

Venice, and, after a genial journey, reached Weimar in the middle of June. A month later he was off to Silesia. It is quite true that Karl August had pressed him to come to Silesia, but those who imagine that his discomfort in Venice was due in any large measure to the separation from Christiane will find it difficult to explain his remarkably prompt obedience in departing and his dallying in the south. Prussia, in whose military service the Duke was now enlisted, was massing troops for the purpose of influencing Austria's designs on Turkey. An invitation to Goethe to join him in camp could hardly be regarded as a pressing and serious command, and, in fact, whatever danger of war there was had been averted before Goethe reached Silesia. He merely spent two months in interesting, if not pleasant, travel. At Dresden he found one of the young acquaintances of his Leipsic days, Minna Stock, married to Judge Körner, a friend of Schiller, and contracted a warm friendship with her husband. He then joined Karl August in camp, and after a few days' riding about the unfamiliar country (near Freiburg) they went on to Breslau.

Goethe's four weeks' stay in Breslau has led to some heated discussion. He attached himself especially to Judge von Shuckmann, an able Prussian minister at a later date, and a young lady in the judge's house, Henriette von Lüthwitz, seems to have stirred his susceptible heart for a moment. Von Shuckmann's younger brother declared in later years that Goethe had a passion for Henriette, and

## Goethe

sought her in marriage. Happily, this belief rests on late and quite unsafe rumours. Henriette von Lüthwitz was a young woman of twenty-three at the time; she saw little of Goethe, and is said to have had no exceptional gifts with which to impress him. That she "pleased him" we are told by Judge von Shuckmann himself, but the claim that there was a more tender relation is founded on the unreliable gossip of a later generation.

Goethe seems at the time to have been more interested in geology than in love or politics. He rode constantly over the country, and even made an expedition to Poland. When Karl August at last left him free to return he spent two days in a geological inquiry and eight further days with the Körners in Dresden. The facts do not lend much sincerity to his complaint from Breslau (August 21st): "I long to be home: I have nothing further to seek in the world." It seems clear that the attitude of Weimar greatly disturbed Goethe, and not improbable that his feeling for Christiane had lost its early warmth. How he would find Weimar on his return may be gathered from a letter which Schiller (who then, thanks to Goethe, had a place at Jena) wrote at the time to Körner. "Things are going foolishly enough with Goethe," he said. "He is getting old [he was then forty-one], and the love of women which he has so often ridiculed seems to be having its revenge on him. He will, I fear, pay for his folly, and have the usual fate of an old bachelor." Goethe knew that such things were whispered throughout Weimar and Jena. The



## The New Goethe

Herders alone recognised Christiane in some degree. For the rest she was "the woman Vulpius." When Goethe entertained men she waited, but did not sit, at table. Women at that time he did not entertain.

Frau Herder refrained from joining in the chatter, but Christiane's latest apologist, Ludwig Geiger, sadly admits that she probably had an eye "to material advantages." She wanted Goethe to support her monetary claims on the Duke, and we shall find her turning on him with extreme bitterness when he fails to do so. One woman alone entirely overlooked the irregularity of his union and approved his choice. It was Goethe's mother. We do not know when she first heard of the connection, but she certainly knew and condoned it when Goethe visited her in 1792, and later we shall find her receiving Christiane with the utmost friendliness and describing her, with more generosity than judgment, as "an unspoiled creature of God." From that period I date the closer approach of mother and son; I repeat that every statement which seems to imply that their relations had always been normal belongs to the last years of her life. She won the heart of her son, after forty years of coolness, by approving the action which nearly every woman in Germany condemned. From that time only he becomes conscious of a duty to visit her in her loneliness, and his letters are touched with a warmer feeling.

The five years that follow the union with Christiane are, from the artistic point of view,

## Goethe

amongst the most barren of Goethe's career. The muses whisper to him no longer, and he devotes his genius to prosy scientific research and, to the dismay of his friends, fills his house with stones and dead bones and optical apparatus. In that period falls the French Revolution, which shakes Europe to its farthest bounds, yet leaves the first poet and humanist of Europe almost coldly indifferent. On the very battlefield he studies optics, in order to refute Sir Isaac Newton, while the revolutionary cannons are pealing out their world-message at Valmy. We shall find it convenient first to consider his relation to the war and the Revolution, then to examine his scientific achievements, before the muses return to him in the person of Friedrich Schiller.

## CHAPTER XII

### GOETHE AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

No more misleading inscription was ever put upon a literary monument than when Carlyle opened each volume of his spirited and penetrating history of the French Revolution with a quotation from Goethe. Those three verses from the *Venetian Epigrams* are almost all that Goethe wrote about the Revolution in its earlier and more important years, and they express rather the feeling of a reluctant and disdainful spectator than the insight of an historian or a student of men. If some accident were to erase from the literature of Europe all that was written on the greatest event of modern times by the greatest contemporary writer, the historian would not miss it. Goethe had no conception of the long stride that was being made under his eyes by the history of man; he did not see that, whilst he split light in his prisms and tapped the grey rocks with his geological hammer, Europe was passing definitely from the medieval to the modern era.

If we would understand this failure of the profound realistic poet and most acute observer to understand the mighty human movement of his time we must recollect the political ideal which he had slowly formed. However much or little he may

## Goethe

have shared the sentiments of the young Stolbergs, when they called for the blood of tyrants, practical experience of governing men had made him a benevolent aristocrat. The masses suffered, and must be relieved; but the work must be done by middle-class experts or nobles under the rule of a humane prince. He had attempted to govern Weimar on those principles, and had discovered that the humanity of princes had its limits and the zeal of middle-class experts even narrower limits. Yet Weimar had seemed to be one of the most promising fields for such work; larger States were merely larger areas of corruption, as he had observed at Berlin. He retired in disgust from politics. The Italian journey had confirmed his attitude. Austrian and Papal rulers were as bad as, or worse than, Prussian rulers; on the other hand, the people were totally unfit to govern themselves, and would never be "one wise and happy mass." He concluded that benevolent aristocracy was the ideal, but found the aristocrats singularly lacking in wisdom and benevolence. As we shall see in examining his scientific speculations, his thoughts needed fertilising by a more definite recognition of the principle of evolution. He did not understand nature because its past growth was very imperfectly known to him; he did not understand men because he could not foresee their future growth.

In this mood of political despair he turned to the cultivation of art and science. It is a profound mistake to suppose that he underrated the French

## Goethe and the French Revolution

Revolution because he was coldly indifferent to the lot of men. He had put aside egoism for ever on his thirtieth birthday. His supreme ideal was to multiply truth, beauty, and goodness in the world. These seemed to him commodities of vastly greater value than the material gifts of the politician and the political economist, and their worth to mankind redeemed art and science of their apparent selfishness. As artist and as student of science he trusted to enrich the world. Let the stream of culture grow broader, and the antics of politicians would matter little, he thought.

Hence it was that Goethe paid so little attention to the resounding echoes of the French Revolution. At the time when he was trying to reconcile Frau von Stein to the ashes of his dead love, the Third Estate was towering upward at Versailles; a few months later the Bastille fell. Goethe seems to have shrugged his shoulders. The Diamond Necklace affair had revealed to him the corruption of the ruling class, but, as he was very little informed about the successful experiment in democracy in America, he expected no good or enduring result from the rising in France. As the Revolution proceeded, Herder and others of his colleagues echoed its enthusiasm; Goethe smiled at them. It is sometimes said that he was the wiser, since, when the bloody days of September came, Herder and the other enthusiasts were forced to retract. This is a common misconception of the French Revolution. The Septembrists were not the men who had initiated the Revolution, and no man who had

## Goethe

applauded the struggles of Mirabeau, Sieyes, Lafayette, Talleyrand, etc., ever had cause to repent. If they had not foolishly—though from high motives—laid their power at the foot of the mob, to be snatched up by a lower order of men, the history of Europe would have run differently.

The later violence does not reconcile us to Goethe's early indifference, even if it seemed, superficially, to justify his lack of faith in the people. His first expressions are the verses in the *Venetian Epigrams* to which I have referred. He regards both parties with aversion. The rulers have sinned deeply, but the demagogues merely wish to have a like opportunity of selfishness. The crowd—he had recently described it in *Egmont*—was a mass of poor stupid devils to whom he would not dream of entrusting the delicate machinery of government; but those who had taken advantage of the people's ignorance hardly deserved sympathy when they were punished by a blind and furious revolt. He saw no world-significance in the matter, no conflict of Prometheus and Zeus. It was an unfortunate domestic quarrel in France, of little interest to foreigners. For the rest, these violent upheavals were to be regretted because they interrupted the even flow of culture.

In 1792, however, he was brought face to face with the Revolution. The Prussians and Austrians were going to chastise the rebels, and restore the king to his throne. Karl August had command of the Sixth Prussian Cuirassiers, and he invited Goethe to make the excursion to Paris in their

## Goethe and the French Revolution

company. Goethe was then arranging to move into the house in the Frauenplan which is to-day the chief shrine of Weimar, and he had taken into his house, and found occupation in Weimar for, his Roman friend Meyer. It is probable that on this occasion he did not very willingly leave home, but the Duke had again been extremely generous in having the new house modified to suit him, and the novelty of following a military campaign was not unattractive. With his mind full of optical and botanical experiments, rather than political matters, he left Christiane and her boy to the care of Meyer (who accompanied him to Gotha) and made for the west.

Frankfort lay so obviously on his route that a visit to his mother was now inevitable. It is at this point, in noticing his long neglect of his mother, that Goethe's most devoted biographer, Bielschowsky, speaks of his conduct as "the darkest spot on his career." It seems to me that the extenuating circumstances which Bielschowsky brings forward are strained and fanciful pleas, and that one can only relieve Goethe of grave censure by admitting that his mother had never won his affection. Only once since he had left Frankfort in 1775 had he visited his home, and it is clear that on that occasion the Duke had arranged the visit. He had declined again to accompany the Duke to Frankfort in 1784, and had failed to pass through, as he had promised, on returning from Italy in 1788. The plea that in the earlier years he could not separate himself for so many days from Frau von Stein for the sake of

## Goethe

his mother is as hollow and unconvincing as the plea that in 1788 he feared that he might be tempted to stay in Frankfort. His mother did not attract him, and he felt so little indebted to her that he would visit her only when circumstances took him in that direction.

Not less unconvincing is Goethe's own statement that he went to Frankfort in 1792 partly in order to test if he would be able to live there. Apart from his material dependence on the Duke, to which there was no visible alternative, his new home in Weimar and his irregular family forbid us to see in his words more than an idle afterthought. He went to Frankfort because it lay almost on his route, and it was a plain duty to his mother to call. On August 12th he reached his native city. It seems probable that he then told his mother of his domestic arrangements—we have no earlier reference by her to Christiane—and was much gratified at the indulgent way in which she received the news. It would not be hazardous to conjecture that after the visits to his mother in 1792 and 1793 the earlier version of *Wilhelm Meister* was discarded, and Wilhelm's mother became the loving and lovable woman that she is in the present version. Probably she fully deserved the change. The personality which so ingenuously reveals itself in her letters is one of much charm, and Goethe came to appreciate it during these weeks when he was alone with her in his old home. He forgot the chilly days of his boyhood and the grievances of his beloved sister.

From Frankfort he continued westward, and on



## Goethe and the French Revolution

August 27th he joined the regiment in the camp at Prancourt. The work in which he describes his adventures, *The Campaign in France*, is one of the most interesting pieces of war correspondence that has ever been written. Simply, minutely, and dispassionately he follows the daily march and struggle, so that the campaign appears before us with wonderful vividness. Of large views and penetrating judgments on the deeper issues it is wholly devoid. He was not interested in the issue. He describes the emigrant nobles attending to their own horses, or cooking their foraged eggs on the camp-fire in the terrible mud, with gracious acknowledgment of their bravery, but not the least sympathy with their cause. He keenly follows the tactics of Dumouriez, almost risking his life to get a good view of the movements, but ignores the "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity" of the French standard as if it were a meaningless Sanscrit inscription. "I want the blood of neither democrat nor aristocrat," he writes. He shelters behind a wall, fiercely discussing Newton's theory of light with Prince Reuss, while the cannons of Verdun are thundering out their message to the world. It is true that when Dumouriez and Kellermann force the astounded Allies to retreat he exclaims to the officers round the camp-fire: "From this moment a new epoch opens in the history of the world." This, however, is only a momentary glimpse, caught in the agitation following upon the first reverse, and it is not supported by a single word in any of the letters he wrote at the time.

## Goethe

The chief interest of *The Campaign in France* is the charming picture which it affords of the great poet adapting himself to the roughness and disorder of a strenuous adventure. The army was advancing in high spirits when Goethe joined his Weimar friends, and he wrote to Christiane that he would bring her a present from Paris. Longwy had surrendered at once; the route to the French capital seemed to be beset only by a few regiments of sansculottists whom the experienced soldiers of Prussia and Austria would scatter at a charge. The weather was abominable, but Goethe, like all the others, took the discomfort genially. He told the Duchess Amalia that the incessant rains led them to suspect that Jupiter was a sansculotte; when he heard that the Jena students had rebelled in a body, because their sacred right to fight duels had been curtailed, he made fresh jokes about the Revolution. For a week or two his sprightly letters showed the lightness with which he regarded the campaign.

When they reached and bombarded Verdun, Goethe became absorbed in a pool with a remarkable play of light in its depths, though he several times went within the range of cannon-balls to observe the combatants. Verdun soon surrendered, and officers gathered gaily to study the map of the route to Paris which Goethe had brought from Frankfort. In a few days, they said, they would drink the wines of Chalons and Épernay; and when fourteen pretty flower-decked maidens of the town welcomed the king, and the ladies merrily danced at their ball, they imagined the intervening provinces ready to

## Goethe and the French Revolution

embrace their feet. Goethe was becoming more closely acquainted with his companions. He noted in his diary that he had discovered in the military world "a kind of hypocrisy which has a special character, and differs from that of the Church and the Court."

After a few days they once more advanced, and the horrors of that disastrous campaign began to close round them. The rain fell pitilessly, and they trudged onward through ever-deepening mud. Goethe felt that his elegant four-horse carriage, in which he had hitherto driven and slept, gave him an invidious comfort, and he abandoned it to his servant. Then the lengthening of the lines of communication disturbed the supply of food, and hungry regiments flung themselves at night on the deserted villages, only to find that the first-comers had already looted them. A sullen roar of curses succeeded to the earlier gaiety. "Happy the man," says Goethe at this point, "whose bosom swells with a lofty passion." He means that amidst all these horrors and sufferings he was sustained by the hope of refuting the English impostor Isaac Newton and of revealing to the world the true nature of colour. At last the distant thunder of the cannons of Dumouriez was heard, and the order passed round to advance with caution and without baggage. The result was that food entirely failed at the next halt, and the soldiers foraged in the wildest confusion. Goethe promptly imitated the others, and succeeded in securing four bottles of wine from a few soldiers who guarded a hidden cellar. With this passport he easily joined the scanty meal of the

## Goethe

emigrant nobles. There is little depth in his reflections when the flickering light of the camp-fire reveals to him, amongst the bespattered and dejected group, the Marquis de Bombelles, whom he had greeted as French ambassador at Venice only two years before. However painful the road, they all felt, it led to Paris and luxury.

But it was the evening of the nineteenth of September, the day before the historic cannonade at Valmy which blew into shreds the last hopes of the emigrants. When it was discovered by the Allies that, not merely were they checked, but they had blundered into such a position that the French lay between them and Germany, "all the glow of the army was at once extinguished." In that action and during the appalling retreat which followed Goethe behaved with the coolness of a veteran. In his eagerness to observe he rode out to advanced posts, and was on one occasion exposed to a dangerous fire. At night, when he gathered at the fire with friends and strangers, he had to beg a little dry bread to satisfy his hunger. He bought a cloth from a soldier, and, wrapping himself in it, slept on the open field in a storm of wind and rain. They occupied this position for several days, living on the scantiest food and scourged by dysentery, cursing the blunders of their discordant commanders and fearing at every moment the onslaught of the invisible French.

At last retreat was ordered, and they began the long and terrible march of which he has given us so vivid a description. Sick and wounded comrades

## Goethe and the French Revolution

had to be abandoned to the uncertain mercy of the sansculottists. It was as much as the enfeebled and starving horses could do to drag the necessary guns and wagons through the mud. Sodden, dispirited, foodless, menaced by a foe whose ability they now realised, the soldiers of Prussia and Austria wearily dragged their limbs toward the distant frontier. When night fell, Goethe went supperless to bed; though on this occasion he was awakened by the smell of roast pork, and went out to find and share with a group of servants who had discovered a pig. They were aroused at two in the morning, and a long march brought them, "not without tears," to the site of their former camp. After another night of scanty and broken sleep they were driven onward through the horrible mud, in which dying horses and discarded wagons punctuated the route. Goethe's four horses could no longer drag his chaise, which he had resumed, along the road. He handed them over once more to his servant, and rode in the kitchen-wagon. It is one of the quaintest moments of his narrative. He had taken from his chaise Fischer's *Physical Lexicon*—"A dictionary," he observes, "is the best thing to have in these cases where one may be interrupted at any moment"—and buried himself in its academic columns, while the kitchenmaid blubbered in a corner of the wagon and the worn and sullen columns marched without.

Fever, dysentery, and death stalked with them over the sodden and desolate country, and even Goethe was depressed. "For the first time," he says, "my companions remarked that I had no jest

## Goethe

to cheer them, but a face as long as theirs." At least he "organised a strategical forage." With the cook and his assistants he gathered vegetables for the troops, and had the luck in one place to discover a pig. On the next day he lost sight of his chaise, which contained all his precious notes on optics, and he joined the leaden march in lower spirits. It was a season of phenomenal rainfall. The Duke of Brunswick accosted Goethe one day, and said that he was glad they had "an honourable witness to the fact that they had been beaten by the elements, not by the enemy." For four weeks they continued the terrible march. Dead horses rotted in the fields and pools, fever and dysentery struck men down every hour, tents became too worn and broken to keep out the pitiless rain at night, and at times there was not even a bundle of straw to place on the quagmire in which Goethe had to sleep. Only when some town was struck on the march did he obtain a bed and a good meal. In one of the houses he found a mirror, and saw himself for the first time in many days. An ugly growth of bristles disfigured his face, and his long dark hair was matted and hung in the wildest confusion. On every side were thousands of similar men, pallid with disease and hunger and fatigue, trudging wearily in the heavy mud with a formidable enemy in the rear.

They reached Trèves on October 23rd. Of Goethe's reflections on reaching safety two lines are devoted to the fact that he had dysentery and a hundred to a description of the Roman monument at Ygel; and he at once plunged again into his

## Goethe and the French Revolution

optical studies. He was startled a few days later to receive a letter from his mother suggesting that he should be nominated as a candidate for office at Frankfort. He rejected at once, though he took some time to reply; Weimar was now his home in every respect, and indeed Frankfort was so close to the advancing French that he foresaw its invasion. On the last day of October he left his chaise in Trèves, and went by water to Coblenz. The campaign was over for the time, and Goethe was free to return to Weimar. He seems to feel that he cannot easily explain why he did not do so. He was, he feebly remarks, "seized with a reversed homesickness, and felt a longing for the wide world instead of the marrow." When we recollect that a new and handsome house awaited him, and that he would normally be eager to supervise the instalment of his books and collections, his delay must be regarded as further proof that Christiane no longer attracted him. He spent four or five weeks in protracted visits to friends before he sought Weimar.

First he spent some weeks with Fritz Jacobi near Düsseldorf. Goethe had advanced far beyond the frame of mind in which he had once been able to spend intimate hours with Jacobi. On most topics the conversation only revealed their wide divergence. Jacobi was unchanged in his religious mysticism; Goethe had assumed a pronounced attitude of what his host called "realism," and probably regarded as "paganism." Their warm friendship held, however, and the freedom of the house and

## Goethe

fine circle of friends induced Goethe to tarry there. He went on to the house of Princess Gallitzin at Münster, a somewhat curious host for the neopagan artist. Daughter of a Prussian general and wife of a Russian prince, tender, spiritual, and introspective, she had embraced the Catholic religion and lived in an atmosphere of piety and philanthropy. She had made Goethe's acquaintance at Weimar seven years before, and had met him several times at watering-places in the summer. She had a taste for art, however, a liberal mind, and a cultivated circle, and Goethe enjoyed his stay. He spoke of Catholic art more appreciatively than he had done in Italy, and the Princess genially accused him of accommodating himself to her circle. She had, she said, been warned that he could talk with very misleading piety when he cared. But she had a high regard for him, and he seems to have found her very attractive. He left with regret, taking with him her collection of cut stones, which she insisted on giving him.

It was near midnight on December 16th when he entered Weimar. There was "a domestic scene," he says, "which would light up the deepest darkness in a novel." He does not explain why it had been postponed for two months. His family was now established in the new house in the Frauenplan (the present "Goethe House"), and Meyer lived with them. It would also give him pleasure to learn that his mother had opened a correspondence with Christiane, and sent presents to her. Not only, however, was the chilly and exasperating attitude



## Goethe and the French Revolution

of Weimar unchanged, but the letters he had written to Christiane in his absence show that his feeling toward the girl was no longer that of the uncalculating epicure. He had told her, rather sharply, to restrain her conduct toward young men, and had had a tearful reply. The boy August, a beautiful child, forged a new link between them, but a second child (in 1791) had been stillborn, and they were destined to rear no more children.

His inner life also was comparatively aimless. He pursued his optical researches, studied Plato, and began the large and unsuccessful poem "Reinecke Fuchs," the undue expansion of a fable, in which he shed some disdain on men. The reopening of the campaign in the early spring brought him a fresh "summons," as he calls it, to join the Duke. He called at Frankfort, which was again in German hands, and spent a week with his mother. On May 27th he joined the Duke at Marienborn and settled down in camp for the siege of Mainz. The interest of the *Campaign in France*, however, is not sustained after the famous retreat, and we need not dwell upon his experiences. It is a poor diary-like narrative, with occasional flashes of artistic description. We need note only that he moves amongst the stirring scenes of the siege with even more Olympian indifference to the issues than he had shown in the earlier campaign. He distinguishes himself for courage and humanity incidentally, but has the dispassionate air of a war-correspondent belonging to some neutral nation. When the town surrendered, on July 26th, he, at some risk,

## Goethe

intervened more than once to protect departing French soldiers from the infuriated citizens, but the apparent coming triumph of the Allies draws from him no more serious reflections than the triumph of the Republicans had done in the preceding year. His dominating issue is still the nature of colour, which he discusses with almost everybody he meets.

Released from the camp, he went to Düsseldorf, and spent some days with Demoiselle Delf and his brother-in-law Schlosser. He went on to Frankfurt, where he persuaded his mother to sell the big house and live in greater comfort. Toward the end of August he returned to Weimar. The Duke had now resigned his regiment in the Prussian army, and there was to be no more campaigning. Goethe confesses that, in spite of all he had undergone, he had liked the experience and shared the general regret. But when he reaches the end of his story, and we eagerly look for deeper reflections on the campaign, we find the curt sentence: "We will now close, in order not to be involved in questions of world-destiny"!

He returned to Weimar on his birthday. On November 22nd a little daughter was born, but she died a fortnight later, leaving him in deep distress. The blunder of the earlier reformers in France had now shown its darkest consequences. The Reign of Terror had begun at Paris, and it would be useless to expect in Goethe any feeling but sorrow and disdain—disdain at the awful spectacle of the sacred names of Reason, Liberty, and Humanity

## Goethe and the French Revolution

embroidered on the red banners of the Terrorists. Herder was now at one with him; Schiller sternly rejected the title of citizen of France which had been bestowed on him. The reaction caused no change in Goethe. He had hoped nothing from the Revolution, and was merely saddened to find that its inevitable blunders had taken on so bloody a complexion. But with equal calmness he recollected the sins of the rulers of France and refused to interest himself in the struggle. It was a lamentable disturbance of the even flow of civic and cultural life, and the wise men, he thought, should wait in silence for the storm to subside.

All that Goethe has ever written on the French Revolution betrays this same indecisive and detached attitude. His larger play, *Der Gross-Kophtha*, was conceived in 1786 when he gazed upon the dark world of aristocratic corruption which had been suddenly lit up by the Diamond Necklace affair. Passing from the idea of a satirical opera to that of a comedy, he concluded the work in the autumn and winter of 1791, and it was played at Weimar. In the meantime, however, the Revolution had occurred, and had softened his attitude toward the aristocratic sinners and their Cagliostros. The result is an unpleasing and too lengthy attempt to manufacture comedy out of unsuitable material, and to play round a great social movement without any definite conviction of its meaning.

He returned to the theme during his stay in Weimar between the campaign in France and the siege of Mainz, and wrote *Der Bürgergeneral* (*The*

## Goethe

*Citizen-general*). It was a small comedy, written in three days: a lively stage-piece, satirising the citizen-soldier and the incongruous echo of fine revolutionary phrases in the mouths of the ignorant people. After his return from Mainz he began to write a "political drama in five acts," which he entitled *Die Aufgeregten* (*The Insurgents*). It was not completed and is of no importance. To speak of it as a "political drama" is playing with words. At the most it might be considered a parody of the Revolution, with a happy ending. A handful of villagers in Germany, excited by the French Revolution, rise against their countess, but are pacified by the discovery of a missing document in regard to her rights. There is no large idea or deep feeling in it. It is a little story of aristocratic sinners and foolish democrats, ending in a placid acceptance of feudal conditions—with justice. Fragments of two other plays connected with the Revolution survive from the same period. *The Natural Daughter*, which Bielschowsky connects with the Revolution, has only the faintest references to it and implies no judgment on it.

There is thus no ground for the statement that Goethe was coldly indifferent to the greatest human movement of his time, yet it must be admitted that he did not grasp its significance and had no message in regard to it. Social life had for Goethe the aspect of an ocean rather than a river. It might at times be lashed by the winds until its monotonous surface broke into a thousand new shapes, but the wind would die away and it would return to its old level.

## Goethe and the French Revolution

He did not, as we do, conceive the life of the world and of man as a stream that, though it may seem at times to suspend its course in the deep sluggish bed, is none the less advancing toward a distant goal. That familiar phrase of our time, social evolution, was unknown to him. Had he conceived history in our evolutionary sense, the French Revolution might have awakened the deepest feeling in him. He would have strained to forecast the morrow of it. As it was, he took what he regarded as the best social arrangement of his time as the equilibrium to which the life of man would return after all its upheavals and depressions. He spoke of the Revolution with less bitterness than others of his time because he recognised that the lash which had infuriated the people was the injustice of their rulers; he spoke of it less leniently than many do now because he lived in the eighteenth century and we in the nineteenth. He resented alike the selfishness of rulers and nobles, the academic theories of educated reformers, and the gross violence of uneducated insurgents; and he had then nothing to do but wait until the gale had spent itself and the life of France returned to a purified condition of humane and benevolent aristocracy.

It should be noticed, in conclusion, that the Revolution fell in one of the most barren periods of his artistic life. It came between the inspiration of Italy and the inspiration of Schiller. Christiane did not inspire him. His restless genius, thus diverted from art and repelled from politics,

## Goethe

expended itself in the purely intellectual tasks of scientific research. We have to see what he achieved in this province before contact with Schiller unseals again the fount of his artistic feeling.

## CHAPTER XIII

### IN THE WORLD OF SCIENCE

WE have noticed from the beginning of Goethe's career a certain instability in the direction of his genius. Convinced as he ought to have been that the one great gift the gods had given him was the gift of song, since in that alone he displayed an excellence far beyond his years in each early decade, he turns aside time after time to explore other fields and develop other faculties. At Strassburg he buries himself in anatomy while the dim shades of Götz and Faust beckon him vainly toward his true path. At Weimar he will divert the sparkling waters of Lodore into a power-station, and be a statesman. At Rome he will become a master in the plastic arts. It was an inevitable result of the many-sidedness of his genius. It is the chief distinction of his mind that it united so articulate an utterance and so fine a sentiment to so broad and embracing a vision.

But Goethe's devotion to scientific research had other and deeper sources than this comprehensive outlook on life, and it therefore remained a passion of his life while other excursions from the field of poetry were quickly recognised as errors. It resulted from the character of his poetic faculty and the character of his religious feeling. The

## Goethe

common antithesis of science and poetry has not so firm a ground as many imagine. The only essential dividing line is that the scientific man is forced to use abstractions, and poetry is concrete. Where the two are united, as is admirably done at times by Tennyson and by Watson, the accuracy of science disappears in the concrete language of the poet. The Teleosaurs or Ceratosaurs of the Jurassic swamps become "the dragons that tare each other in the slime." But there is no reason whatever why a vast and powerful mind should not describe nature in scientific language in one treatise and poetic language in another. The notion that the dissection of "the primrose by the river's brim" spoils the sense of its beauty, or that if you regard it as a Dicotyledon it can be "nothing more" to you, is absurd. Goethe is ample disproof. He wrote superb poetical descriptions of nature, yet the next moment dissected its plants into organs and gathered them into types, tapped its rocks with a geological hammer, and analysed the very colour which sealed the impress of its beauty on the mind. He drew radiant forms of women in *Iphigenia* and *Tasso* and *Hermann and Dorothea*, and then passed to the anatomist's table. In him the artistic imagination was linked with a keen analytic intelligence, and since both his poetical and his religious feelings glorified nature above all, he inevitably took a keen interest in the scientific analysis and synthesis of nature.

We have now to see whether his achievements in this field were commensurable to his genius. We



## In the World of Science

have seen that the pursuit of science was with him no amusement of an idle hour, but a passion sustained for months together and for the greater part of his life. Indeed, he was so conscious of the energy he gave to it during long years that he dared sometimes to say that his work in art was less great than his work in science. Poets lamented his dallying among cemeteries of dead plants and bones; scientific men warned him off their territory as if a poet were a trespassing child. Yet he felt that he had made discoveries which a later generation would appreciate, and it is now not unusual to lay on his grave those laurels of scientific fame which his contemporaries, to his great grief, refused him. It will be convenient here to gather into one summary the scientific work which is spread over his whole career and examine its worth.

The chief aspect of nature to which Goethe devoted himself was the one which primarily occurs to an artist and a nature poet: what is the meaning of the play of light and colour which reveals or creates the greater part of the beauty which man can perceive? When Italy astonished and charmed him with her wonderful robe of colour, when at Rome he began to study painting and create colours out of splashes of stuff on his palette, the question obsessed him. Artists could tell him nothing; I have met artists who, in the twentieth century, had not the least idea of the nature of colour, and were not in the least interested in it. Others told him that an Englishman, Isaac Newton, had explained the nature of colour, and on his return to Weimar he

## Goethe

read Newton's works. It is very probable that he had prematurely come to a conclusion in Rome. Angelica Kauffmann made a number of experiments for him in mixing colours, and he closely observed sunsets and shadows. He now thought that Newton's experiments were wilfully complicated in order to prove his thesis, and he borrowed some apparatus from Professor Büttner.

Other occupations displaced his interest for a year or two, but Büttner pressed for his instruments, and one day Goethe, when he thought of returning them, picked up a prism and looked at the white wall of his room through it. If Newton is right, he thought, the white will disappear, or be replaced entirely by rainbow bands. He was greatly excited to find that the wall remained white, and only a thin edge of colour was obtained at certain parts. "Instinctively," he says, "I exclaimed, 'Newton's theory is wrong.'" Some of the followers of Bergson's theory of instinct or intuition as the great instrument of truth appeal to the discoveries that Goethe is supposed to have made by its aid. They overlook the fact that this "instinctive" discovery was the greatest blunder of his whole career, and that in other departments he approached the truth only in proportion as he distrusted intuition and laboriously collected facts. His intuition was, as is usual, a hasty and premature argumentation. Such conclusions may or may not prove true. In this case the too hasty leap of reason set Goethe on a wrong path which he would never abandon. He misunderstood Newton. He rushed

## In the World of Science

past the truth to embrace an error, spent years in making a pedestal for it, and prejudiced his whole position in the eyes of scientific men by adhering to it. "I attach no importance to all that I have done as a poet," he said to Eckermann, "but I do claim superiority in that I was the only man of my age to learn the true nature of colour."

As Goethe was undoubtedly wrong in the central part of his theory, it will not be advisable to discuss it at any length. Sir Isaac Newton, studying the rainbow band of colour which is produced when light passes through a prism, concluded that the white light contained all the colours before it entered the prism, and that the prism sorted out and placed side by side the differently coloured rays. The prism bends a ray of light out of its path (or refracts it). But the rays which represent the various colours are all refracted to a different extent, so that they have parted company when they emerge from the prism. Goethe had apparently come to a different conclusion from observation in Italy, before he tried any experiments. He thought that colour was due, in a sense, to the mingling of light and darkness, or the passing of light through translucent media. White light was a simple, not a compound, reality; the colours were white light or darkness seen through media of different thickness. All that he saw in nature or experiment seemed to agree with this theory, and he therefore in 1792 set it forth in his *Contributions to Optics*. Physicists ignored it, or treated it with disdain, and he had throughout life the painful feeling that he

## Goethe

had made a discovery which was, he said to Reichardt in 1791, about "to cause many revolutions both in science and art," yet the stubbornness of scientific men prevented its recognition.

There is, of course, no doubt to-day that Goethe was wrong in his theory of objective colour, but his error does not in the least enfeeble his scientific capability. Every candid physicist who checks his observations and deductions to-day, recollecting how imperfect optical instruments were in the eighteenth century, grants that his claim to have established his theory is quite intelligible. It seems at first quite unintelligible that so vast an accumulation of facts as Goethe made should seem to agree with a false conception, but we must remember that the same thing occurred to Newton himself. At that time (the end of the seventeenth century) the nature of light was being discussed. Newton—although there are in his works some vague speculation about wave-movements in ether—was convinced that light consisted of innumerable tiny particles of matter shot off at inconceivable speed by the luminous body. Huyghens insisted, on the contrary, that light was a series of wave-movements or pulsations in the invisible medium which we call ether, but Newton rejected this true conception, and his authority prevented it from being recognised for more than a century. Here, therefore, we have Newton himself ranging over the whole province of optics, yet holding a totally false conception of the nature of light. Such accidents were not uncommon in the earlier days of science.

## In the World of Science

One may even suggest that Newton's error was largely responsible for Goethe's wayward speculation. Even the school-boy to-day knows the chemistry of a candle or the secret of the production of light. The tiny particles of a luminous body are in violent and varied oscillation, and they cause waves of varying lengths in the ether which surrounds them. We can to-day detect these waves (in the form of heat) below the range of visibility, and pursue them beyond the upper limit of visibility. Had this been generally recognised in Goethe's day, even in simple outline, he might have been more disposed to accept Newton's theory of refraction. On the other hand, it is now generally recognised that, if he went astray in regard to the objective nature of colour, he went beyond his time in the subjective analysis of colour perception. Several distinguished physiologists have expressed their admiration of many of his remarks on the physiology of vision.<sup>1</sup> We cannot say that he influenced physiology in this respect, as the cardinal error of his optical theory paralysed his work, but we must grant that he did much sound original work. Here and there, indeed, he expresses quite a modern idea. "The eye," he says (in the introduction to the *Entwurf einer Farbenlehre*), "owes its existence to light. From indifferent animal organs the light produces an organ fitted to perceive it." His idea is vague and crude, but it is the idea of the modern theory of the evolution of the eye.

<sup>1</sup> For details see Dr. R. Magnus, *Goethe als Naturforscher* 1906.

## Goethe

Passing from the colour which reveals nature to the inorganic world, we find Goethe very closely interested in geology and mineralogy. From the time when he became associated with the Ilmenau mines he applied himself to a mastery of geology, and wherever he travelled he carefully examined the rocks and speculated on the way in which they had been formed. In his speculations he took a position which was very sound in view of the state of the science. Its leaders fiercely disputed whether fire or water was the great agency in the formation of the earth's crust. Goethe stood rather between the Vulcanists and Neptunists. The undermost shell of granite rock which surrounds the molten body of the globe was due to fire, but all the stratified rocks above it were due to the action of water upon the granite. Modern geologists question whether we know the "primitive crust" of the earth, and whether its interior is molten, and know that many strata were formed by living things; but for the time Goethe's conception was sound, and may still be held in principle.

It is very important to understand his conception of the formation of the earth, as we shall have to consider presently whether he held what is now known as the doctrine of evolution. In later life he thought of writing a work on the subject, but did not do so, and we have to gather his view from scattered observations. We find that he believed that the earth was once incandescent, as is still generally believed in geology, and that the various strata had been formed in the course of ages by the

## In the World of Science

continuous action of water. In other words, he accepted the principle of continuity long before Sir Charles Lyell enforced it in geology. He even traces the moraines and erratic blocks of southern Germany to a former great extension of the Swiss glaciers, and concludes, with just as much truth as originality, that there was once "a period of great cold," when "a great part of northern Germany was covered with ice." This seems to have been a personal discovery of the Ice Age. But the earlier fossil remains of animals and plants, by means of which we now reconstruct the story of the earth, were little known in his time. We will see presently what he made of such as were discovered.

In other branches of inorganic science he was less informed and less successful. Of chemistry he knew little; of astronomy less. Meteorology he studied more carefully, but it was extremely imperfect at the time, and he ventured upon some unhappy speculations. He thought that variations in the pressure of the atmosphere might be due to alterations in the earth's gravitational influence on it, which could not for a moment be admitted. His chief service here was the great share he had in erecting observing stations. In fact, we may say once for all that he did immense service to every branch of science by pressing the formation of museums, collections, schools and experimental institutions.

It is particularly in connection with the biological sciences that Goethe's work merits careful consideration. His philosophy and art and religious

## Goethe

feeling combined to direct his attention to living nature, and in the natural philosophy, as it is called, of his time he took a prominent and important place. His work is the subject of much controversy. It may be admitted at once that his scientific publications had little or no influence. Even when he discovered truths that are now universally admitted, professional men were so reluctant to learn them from him that he would not publish his theories until late in life, when the ideas were being set forth by others. The question of chief interest is how far he attained a conception of living things in advance of his time, and how far this conception has been embodied in modern science.

In botany, to which he first applied himself, his work was original, thorough, and remarkably anticipatory of modern ideas. We saw that he began in the early years at Weimar to study botany with great ardour, and the richer vegetation of Italy quickened his interest. He soon noticed that the science of botany was wrong on a fundamental principle. The great Swedish botanist, Linné, whose ideas still ruled it, had declared that so many thousand species had been brought into being on creation-day, that each rigidly adhered to its type, and that the work of the botanist was to register and describe these unchanging species. Goethe, pursuing his research in living nature, found that the species *did* change under the influence of the surroundings. There was an inner tendency or impulse to keep to the type, but a tendency to diverge from it in different surroundings: a centri-



## In the World of Science

petal and a centrifugal tendency. At Rome and after his return to Weimar he made large numbers of experiments to show that varying the conditions of soil, temperature, moisture, etc., entailed variations of the plant. In this he forecast one of the chief principles of evolutionary botany.

He went further. Careful study of the flowers of all grades of flowering plants convinced him that the parts of the flower were metamorphosed leaves. It is true that this had already been suggested in 1759 by C. F. Wolff, but the brilliant speculations of this advanced thinker had been ignored, and it is clear that Goethe knew nothing of them until his attention was drawn to them by F. A. Wolff in 1807. It is also pointed out that Linné himself speaks of "the metamorphosis of plants," but he seems to refer only to the evolution of the flower in the individual plant. Goethe meant much more than this. It is now a settled position in modern botany that the flowering plants have been evolved from the flowerless, which preceded them in point of time, and that the petals and sepals, pistils and stamens, are modified leaves (or terminal parts of the stem). Goethe's explanation of the transformation—that the sap is refined as it rises to the higher parts—is merely a crude guess, in spite of some recent efforts to read a modern meaning into it. The microscopic study of the plant was then in its earliest infancy, the cell was unknown, and the science of palæobotany was unborn. We shall find it a remarkable enough achievement if Goethe so far forestalled modern ideas as to declare

## Goethe

that the flowering plants had been developed from the non-flowering by modification of the leaves.

Goethe is, however, singularly vague on what we should regard as the plainest aspect of the question, both in regard to plants and animals. The flowers of the lily and the rose are metamorphosed leaves, he says; the fins of the whale and wings of the bird are metamorphosed legs. Does he mean that, as we now know, the lily and the rose descend from an earlier plant-ancestor that had no flowers, and that the whale and the bird descend from a quadruped ancestor? It will be profitable to make a few general observations on this much-disputed question whether Goethe anticipated the greatest scientific discovery of the nineteenth century, the principle of evolution.

In the first place, it is difficult to see what he meant by "the metamorphosis of plants" and the affinities of animals unless he assumed that, in actual historical sequence, there had been a development from lower to higher. It is true that he approached the subject in a very idealistic frame of mind. He spent days in searching for the "primitive plant," whereas, on modern evolutionary lines, we locate it in the remote past. He felt that he was approaching it when he found a palm at Padua with the leaves so variously modified that it seemed to exhibit his "metamorphosis" to some extent. Then (after the Italian journey) he realised that there was no such thing in nature as his "primitive plant," and he regarded it as an ideal type. Yet one is irresistibly inclined to think that

266

## In the World of Science

he believed the actual metamorphosis of leaves into flowers had taken place at some time or other.

That he did really believe in historical evolution may be shown by a few quotations, some of which are strangely overlooked by writers on the subject. It is well known that toward the close of his life he followed very closely the struggle in the French Academy between Cuvier and Geoffroy St. Hilaire, and declared that the views of the latter scientist were those he himself had always held. The direct issue was whether there is a unity of type in large groups of animals, but Goethe concludes his paper on the controversy by hoping that "the *genetic* standpoint will now have an increased credit." This was in 1832. Ten years before this he had written a paper on a "fossil ox" which had been discovered in Thuringia, and had concluded that it represented "a widespread extinct stem-race, from which the common and the Indian ox had descended." About the same time (1821) he reviewed a word by D'Alton on the sloths and pachyderms (elephants), and said that he agreed with the author, not only as to the "general type," but as to the "protean changeability of forms." Some types, he said, "remain unchanged for many generations"; but he suggests the case of a whale-like animal quitting the ocean, losing its fish-like character, and developing limbs. He calls this "a poetical expression, since prose will not suffice"; in other words, he is making a hypothesis, since the facts are not known. His hypothesis is quite wrong as far as the sloth is concerned, but it clearly shows Goethe entertaining the principle of

## Goethe

evolution. By 1820, of course, it was not unfamiliar. Lamarck had not succeeded in imposing it on science, as Darwin afterwards did, but Lamarck's ideas were discussed.

In fact we may confidently conclude that Goethe was a convinced evolutionist at least twenty years before Lamarck published his great work. I find a letter to Merck (April 3rd, 1780) on Buffon's *Époques de la Nature*, in which the evolutionary view of the earth's story is faithfully, if crudely, followed. "I fully agree with it," he says, "and allow no one to say that it is a hypothesis or a romance. . . . It seems to me to be at least less hypothetical than the first book of Moses." Dr. Magnus further quotes him as saying that he often discussed with Herder "the primitive watery earth and the organic creatures that have been developing upon it since the earliest times."<sup>1</sup> It seems, therefore, clear that he looked at nature from the evolutionary standpoint from the very beginning of his serious scientific studies, nor is it difficult to understand why he refrained from explicitly stating that view until the latter part of his life. The greater part of the past history of the earth was still hidden from men; of the vast treasures buried in the geological strata they were only just beginning to discover some of the later fossils. There was not the remotest possibility then of tracing the living animals and plants along definite lines of buried ancestors to earlier ages. Goethe's "primitive plant" (a plant showing the rudimentary beginning

<sup>1</sup> See also his remarks on the evolution of the eye, p. 261.



LILI SCHONEMANN

## In the World of Science

of flowers) actually existed, but it was buried in the coal-measures, and has only in quite recent years been recognised.

The fate of his first scientific treatises did not encourage him to put forward so speculative a view as evolution then was. When he announced in 1784 that he had discovered a certain missing bone in man, the most distinguished anatomists denied the evidence. When he wrote his *Metamorphosis of Plants* in 1790, his publisher refused to print it. When another publisher undertook it, few botanists were found to consider it seriously. However, as the plant-succession in earlier ages was absolutely unknown in his time, it was not likely that he would put forward any theory of descent. His merit is to have proved, by observation and experiment, the changeability of species and to have suggested that the flower-parts are modified leaves.

In dealing with the animal world he went further. He had studied anatomy at Strassburg, penetrated further in his physiognomical studies with Lavater, and taken up the subject more seriously with Professor Loder at Jena University. His attitude was the same as in regard to the plant: to discover in a large animal group a common type of which the various species were modifications. This grouping of species according to their anatomical affinities was a necessary preparation for the later science of evolution, and, whatever may be said of his work in other branches of science, Goethe was one of the great workers in the field. He became an accomplished and skilful osteologist—a master of “the

## Goethe

science of skeletons," as the skeleton was then the chief object of study. In a very early year of his studies (1784) he made a discovery of some moment. Anatomists assigned a certain bone in the upper jaw of animals (the intermaxillary bone) which, they all said, did not exist in man. Goethe, bent on finding a common type in related groups, searched carefully for it in the human jaw (where it is welded into the other bones) and found it. He wrote an essay on it, and submitted it to experts. Not only the famous anatomist Camper (who, Goethe says, wanted to preserve a distinction between man and the ape), but his friends Loder and Sömmering rejected the evidence, and dissuaded him from publishing. I may add that his later experience in the matter was even worse. The anatomists soon began to admit the fact, without noticing Goethe as a rule, and the credit fell to Vicq d'Azir, who had in point of fact discovered it before Goethe, though the fact was evidently not known in Germany. Goethe's essay was published in 1820.

He next devoted himself to the comparative study of the skull and vertebral column, and came to the conclusion which is known as "the vertebral theory of the skull." Just as the flower-parts were metamorphosed leaves, so the chief skull-bones were metamorphosed vertebræ. The story that he saw this in a flash of intuition, when he picked up an animal's skull at Venice in 1790, is not correct. He had already recognised the vertebral character of the occipital bones; this find merely enabled him to extend his theory to the rest of the skull. Of the

## In the World of Science

theory itself I need only say that it was first generally accepted, then successfully assailed (especially by Huxley), and later modified by Gegenbaur. It is not true in the sense in which Goethe conceived it; the bones of the skull are not metamorphosed vertebræ. The theory proved, however, a most fruitful stimulus to comparative work, and once more Goethe lost the credit for it. In 1807 Professor Oken, whom he had secured for Jena, began to expound the same view. Goethe declined to say that he had previously made the discovery, and, when his treatise on osteology was printed in 1820, Oken regarded it with suspicion. After Goethe's death there was a painful controversy as to which of the two had plagiarised. It is now quite clear that they had reached the view independently, and that Goethe was the first to do so; but it was Oken who, by his earlier publication and his expert authority, had the good fortune to introduce it into science.

Other instances might be quoted to show that Goethe had a masterly and profitable command of the new province of comparative anatomy, but we may turn rather to consider his comprehensive treatment of it. In 1795 he published his most important scientific work, the *First Sketch of a General Introduction to Comparative Anatomy*. Even if we demur to the somewhat common statement that he founded the science of comparative anatomy or morphology, on the ground that others were about the same period turning to comparative study and it is not clear that they received the



## Goethe

impulse from Goethe, we must grant a great distinction to this little work. Its chief aim is to take the larger groups of the known animal world and to trace an ideal type of skeleton in each group. This was precisely the doctrine which Geoffroy St. Hilaire held in his famous struggle with Cuvier thirty-five years afterwards. Cuvier disdainfully said that he was well aware that a number of German scientists had pressed the same view in order to support their Pantheistic theories, but he did not mention Goethe. Yet Goethe preceded both Oken and St. Hilaire, and his little treatise shows the knowledge and insight of a master.

The importance of this doctrine of ideal types is that it prepared students for the acceptance of evolution. The next step in science would be to show that this ideal type had actually existed in an earlier ancestor, and that the various species of the group were historical descendants from it. I have already shown that Goethe had taken this further step. Before the end of his life he speculated more than once on the earlier common ancestors of widely removed groups of animals, but the science of fossil remains was as yet in so rudimentary a state that he wisely restricted his evolutionary expressions. The main principles of his work imply evolution. The doctrine of ideal types may be in itself no more than a metaphysical abstraction; analogies between the various species of a group might be recognised by a man who held, nevertheless, that they had been separately created. Goethe, however, pressed with equal

## In the World of Science

clearness and emphasis the complementary principle that divergences from the type were due to the environment and the habits of the organism. In this there is nothing metaphysical or abstract. It is a plain indication of the actual branching of a group from a simpler common ancestor. It is too often forgotten by those who dispute whether Goethe did or did not accept the principle of evolution that he certainly did not accept the first chapter of *Genesis*, or the distinct creation of each species of animal and plant; and that, on the other hand, he accepted the doctrine (from Buffon) of the natural evolution of the sun and the earth. In view of these facts, and the quotations I have given, it seems to me certain that Goethe regarded the several groups of animals as genealogically connected.

In many other ways Goethe went beyond the science of his time and more or less clearly anticipated later views. He emphatically rejected the teleological attitude; you must, he said, not ask *for what purpose* the ox got its horns or the rodent its teeth, but *how* it got them, and he spoke freely of the natural evolution of horns and other organs. The rudimentary (or, as we now say, vestigial) organs in animals he properly described as divergences by atrophy from the type of the class. In a less clear way he formulated the doctrine of the correlation of organs. In a word, his little work, written in incisive aphoristic style, carries the science of anatomy or of zoology decades beyond his time, and is lit by many a foregleam of coming truth.

## Goethe

He was no amateur or dilettante in the science; unless one is to define an amateur as a man who does not occupy an academic chair and is master of more than one branch of culture. He completely mastered the collections of the museum, made a closer study of animals and plants in living nature than was then usual, and certainly surpassed the biologists of his time in checking observation by experiment. For instance, when he made a careful study of insects between 1796 and 1798 he employed dissection and vivisection, and the experimental use of variation of temperature, besides ordinary observation.

We may therefore answer the question which I proposed by saying that Goethe's achievements in science were quite commensurable to his genius. If he rejected the truth which Newton discovered in regard to colour, Newton no less rejected the truth which Huyghens discovered with regard to light, and fell into many absurdities in his later years. His grasp of living nature was extraordinary for his time; it was imperfect and hesitating only in comparison with ours. There is every reason to believe that he regarded the living population of the world as a genealogically connected family, which few men dared to do until many decades afterwards, but of the geological record of the family-development only a few stray syllables were known in his time, and he could not be more than vague and suggestive. His greatness in art created in the mind of most of his contemporaries an unjust prejudice against his activity in science, and he

## In the World of Science

was thus prevented from exercising the profound and useful influence which he ought to have exercised. We do not therefore expect to find him enrolled amongst the pioneers in the ordinary histories of science, but no man who is acquainted both with modern science and with Goethe's scientific writings can hesitate to pronounce him a master of science in his day, an original and profound thinker. He used his great authority to stimulate and promote scientific research and scientific education, and a number of distinguished botanists, anatomists and geologists corresponded with him in terms of honour.

It would be proper, in conclusion, to consider his relation to philosophy, but the question may be curtly dismissed by an admission that he was too convinced a realist to pay serious attention to metaphysical systems. Medieval philosophy he would not deign to study; of the ancients he read only Plato, from whom he took such separate ideas as he liked. Of later thinkers he studied only Spinoza and Kant. To the mathematical side of Spinoza he paid little heed, but he fully accepted Spinoza's religious Pantheism. Kant apparently perplexed him; he took ideas from Kant, and ignored his system. Schelling, definitely Pantheistic and realistic, appealed more to him. But the great age of German philosophy was only beginning in the middle of his life, and he seems to have felt that it afforded little aid in the interpretation of nature, which was to him reality.

## CHAPTER XIV

### GOETHE AND SCHILLER

THE seven lean years of Goethe's artistic life were brought to a close by the commencement of his intimacy with Friedrich Schiller. There is in the chronicle of letters no story of the brotherly co-operation of two supreme artists more refreshing than the story of the association of the princes of German poetry. With equal truth and generosity the older poet wrote to the younger: "You have given me a second youth and made me a poet once more." The fountains of his inspiration were unsealed; or, if we recall the pretty allegory he had once adopted, the stream was again diverted from the mills and power-stations, and fell with its old sparkle and melody down the sides of the mountain. The years of his companionship with Christiane Vulpius had been singularly sterile, if we recollect how he had returned to Weimar in the glow of perfect health, sensuous feeling, and artistic ambition. To employ another of the rich figures he himself used, the seed was thick in the soil, but the winter's snows lay upon it. At the warm touch of Schiller the chill departed and the soil stirred with life. As long as Schiller remained to inspire and impel him, he produced luxuriantly.

It is hardly necessary to repeat here the familiar points of contact and of contrast between the two

## Goethe and Schiller

great poets, but one cannot pass in silence the customary and misleading statement that one was a realist and the other an idealist. Goethe had been from the start both realist and idealist; from the time when he had reached his maturity at Weimar he had been a profound idealist. Probably if the question had been put to him he would have said that he regarded himself as much more idealistic than the author of *The Robbers*; more probably he would have resented the antithesis. In his view nature and spirit were but two aspects of reality, and the sound mind contemplated and cultivated both. He might have said that Schiller's was the idealism of adolescence; his the measured idealism of manhood. But Schiller was maturing and bringing his ideals closer to reality. Both studied Plato, and they agreed that the Good, the True, and the Beautiful were not, as Plato said, in another world, but in this. Briefly, there was between the predominantly realistic mind of Goethe, with its steady outlook on nature, and the predominantly idealistic mind of Schiller, with its bias for inward vision, contrast enough to afford a profitable stimulus to both; yet realism and idealism were sufficiently blended in both to admit an intimate approach, and the nobleness of the character of each enabled them to derive the most brotherly encouragement from their very differences.

Goethe had, as I have previously recorded, met Schiller for the first time in 1788. The younger poet was at that time embittered by poverty and by the hesitating recognition of his genius. Start-

## Goethe

ing life as a regimental surgeon, he had, like Goethe, felt the rebellious stirring of artistic inspiration in his blood and fled from his prosy studies. In 1779 he had seen Goethe in a public assembly at Stuttgart, and had noted with kindling eye the homage paid to the poet and the ease with which he bore the friendship of princes. He had abandoned the military-medical world, and committed himself to the precarious and hungry career of a young poet. At Dresden he had lived much with the Körners, whom Goethe had taken into his circle of friends; at Darmstadt he had seemed to win the favour of Karl August, and had received from him the honorary dignity of Councillor. The Duchess Luise appreciated his work. The path to Weimar seemed to open before him.

In 1787 Frau von Kalb, who admired him, invited him to Weimar, but it was only to receive a bitter disappointment. Goethe was in Italy, the Duchess Luise absent; Wieland and Herder ignored him. He waited impatiently for the return of Goethe, too lightly admitting in the meantime the censures of Goethe's envious colleagues. He wrote to Körner that Goethe earned eighteen hundred thalers a year by enjoying himself, while subordinate officers sweated like cattle in doing his work at Weimar. He might have learned that Goethe had worn himself out by years of heavy ministerial work. During his stay in the province he fell in love with Charlotte Lengefeld, who lived at Rudolstadt and was very friendly with Frau von Stein. He seemed to be a little nearer to Goethe.

## Goethe and Schiller

In September 1788, we saw, Goethe went to visit Frau von Stein at Kochberg, and the ladies took him to Rudolstadt, where Schiller was staying. It proved another disappointment for Schiller. It was just the time when Goethe's nearest friends were complaining of his coldness and aloofness. There was no warmth of recognition in his attitude toward Schiller, and he seemed to forget him immediately. The play by which Schiller was then known in Germany was *The Robbers*, and he probably expected the author of *Götz* to appreciate it, but we have seen how far Goethe had outgrown that lawless mood. He was not likely to give encouragement to a young writer of insurgent melodrama.

He had, however, not forgotten Schiller. The chair of history at Jena University became vacant soon afterwards, and it was offered to Schiller, who accepted sullenly. It was an unsalaried appointment, and would look like a dismissal from Weimar. Probably Goethe's serious intention was to concentrate Schiller's ability on sober work, but we must confess that he judged him superficially and failed to recognise his genius. Further bitter observations were sent to Dresden. In February 1790 Schiller married Lotte Lengefeld, and found that her acquaintance with Goethe brought him no nearer. He had now been nearly three years in or about Weimar and was still unrecognised. "The man is always in my way," he wrote querulously to Körner of Goethe, "reminding me constantly how badly fate has treated me." History does not censure poor Schiller. Delicate, ailing, nervous, and poor, living



## Goethe

an insecure manhood after an unhappy boyhood and storm-driven youth, he could not but resent the easy paths that fate had assigned for the genius of Goethe.

Possibly Goethe was better disposed toward Schiller when he attached himself, in 1790, to Judge Körner at Dresden. There was, however, no outward expression of a better feeling, and Schiller despaired. The years slowly passed. In 1792 Schiller was hailed as a distant brother by the revolutionaries at Paris, and presented with the citizenship of France. Goethe would feel that the young man must outgrow these things before he could grant him any higher recognition. And Schiller grew, rapidly. The excesses of the revolutionaries led him to disavow any kinship with them, and the serious study of Kant's philosophy, the successive volumes of which were then appearing, strengthened the intellectual frame of his genius. He also unconsciously approached Goethe by making a close study of classical models.

At length, apparently in May or June 1794, a conversation opened at hazard gave Goethe some knowledge of the real Schiller. They had attended a meeting of the Scientific Society at Jena, and, leaving the room together, they fell into discussion. Goethe was interested; he accepted Schiller's invitation to continue the conversation in his house. They spoke of nature and art, and he was impressed by the penetration and unexpected maturity of the younger man. When, for instance, he explained to Schiller his search for the ideal plant, Schiller

280

## Goethe and Schiller

at once said that it was "an idea," not a reality. In the pre-evolutionary state of botany that was correct, and Goethe was coming to realise it. Schiller followed up the conversation by asking Goethe to contribute to the *Horen*, a literary periodical he had established at Jena. The surviving draft of Goethe's reply shows with what care he weighed the proposal. He promised his "cordial co-operation." Schiller then wrote him a remarkable appreciation and analysis of his genius, and Goethe frankly abandoned his reserve. "I could not have desired a better birthday present," he said. For a few months they continued to exchange their views, and in 1795 they entered upon their memorable partnership.

Goethe's circumstances materially aided his approach to Schiller. Since his glorious weeks in Rome he had been less disposed to regard Weimar as "the Court of the Muses." After Meyer and Herder—with whom he was presently to quarrel—there were few with whom he could enjoy the discussion of large themes. His unfortunate domestic arrangements and the acidity they provoked in the ladies of Weimar oppressed him. At Jena, on the other hand, was a finely cultured group to which he must have looked rather wistfully. The alliance with Schiller gave him the atmosphere of erudition and fine feeling which he found it so pleasant to breathe, and he soon became the centre of a brilliant circle. The Schlegels, Brentano, the Humboldts, Voss, Fichte (followed by Schelling and Hegel) and other scholars whose names remain in the

## Goethe

chronicle of German culture, illuminated the little university town; and their society did not lack women of great charm and distinction. The personal stimulation which Schiller gave to Goethe cannot be exaggerated, but the influence of the Jena group as a whole was probably greater than is usually conceived. He had suffered, as one from the valley suffers in the rare atmosphere of the mountain-top, since he had left Rome. Now he breathed easily once more. It is true that the representatives of poetry in the group strayed in a direction which Goethe disliked—the direction of Romanticism; on the other hand, his interest in science and philosophy was quickened at the companionship of such masters as Voss, the Humboldts, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. From 1795 onward he spent several months of each year at Jena, leaving Christiane to enjoy at Weimar the lower gaieties which alone appealed to her sensuous and uncultivated nature.

Meyer, of course, entered the group, but Herder, whether from dislike of Schiller or no, drifted away from Goethe and, in 1795, was sharply sundered from him. A vague promise had been made to Herder that the Duke would make a more generous provision for him as his family grew. The education of their children now seriously concerned the Herders, and they appealed to the Duke. Karl August made no effort to evade the promise, but he proposed to aid them in a way which did not satisfy them, and they fell into a pitifully nervous condition. Caroline Herder impetuously wrote to ask

282

## Goethe and Schiller

Goethe to "save the Duke's honour and morality," and somewhat stridently insisted that they must at once have a large sum of money. Goethe was of the Duke's opinion, and this offensive language angered him. In a most unusually stern and unsparing letter he rejected the poor woman's demands and brought to an unhappy close his long association with the Herders.

The first notable outcome of Goethe's association with Schiller was the publication of the *Xenien* in the autumn of 1796. We recollect how, in the earlier years at Frankfort, Goethe, Merck, and Schlosser had formed a kind of club for the survey and improvement of German letters, and had drawn the anger of the Philistines. A much more formidable "academy" was now established at Jena. The Sturm und Drang movement had spent its fury, and German literature had, in general, sunk again to its mediocre level. Goethe and Schiller and their colleagues now, through the *Horen*, sent a fresh challenging blast through the land. It found an echo in every stronghold of the Philistines, and the *Horen* was fiercely assailed for impiety, conceit, and affectation. Goethe replied, in 1795, with an article on "Literary Sansculottism," but he presently meditated a more biting and comprehensive indictment. The epigrams of Martial suggested an effective form. He induced Schiller, who was at first reluctant, to join with him, and at the beginning of 1796 they set about writing a thousand epigrams on the literary sinners, mediocrities, and Philistines of Germany.

## Goethe

They co-operated so closely in these epigrams that German writers have little success in separating the work of Goethe from that of Schiller. Sometimes Goethe found the idea and Schiller gave it form, sometimes the reverse. The *Xenien* were afterwards described by Goethe himself as "a silly enterprise," but they remain, in form, a brilliant piece of German letters; in substance they are, as is natural, of only passing interest. It will be enough to quote two of the epigrams from the excellent translation by Dr. Paul Carus (1896), in which the difficult structure of the verse is faithfully preserved :

"When thou reviled'st the Olympian gods, threw relentless  
Apollo  
Thee from Parnassus. Thou now enter'st the  
heavenly realm." <sup>1</sup>

This venomous shaft is, it is interesting to note, aimed at Fritz Stolberg. The youth who had thirsted for the blood of tyrants and flung love-sacred glasses against the wall had become a most respectable and religious lord of the land. The distant glare of the fires in France had thrown a new light on the democratic ideal, and he had ventured to join the chorus of the Philistines in lamenting the paganism of the Jena group. An even more venomous shaft is drawn on Lavater :

"Pity 'tis, when thou wast born, that but one man nature  
created !  
Stuff for a gentleman is and for a scoundrel in  
thee."

---

<sup>1</sup> I have altered "you" in Dr. Carus's translation to "thou." The epigram is on Fritz Stolberg, not the two brothers.

## Goethe and Schiller

Goethe could not easily be pardoned if this thrust were prompted only by the preacher's natural dislike of his neopaganism, but it seems that Lavater had acted unworthily. We must remember, however, that we do not know which epigrams were written by Goethe and which by Schiller, and that the kindly descriptions of his old friends which were afterwards given by Goethe in *Poetry and Truth*, and which we have followed in earlier chapters, made some amends to them. Jung (Stilling) also was put in the terrible pillory. Schiller had no more tenderness than Goethe for wounded piety.

The 1797 issue of Schiller's *Musenalmanach*, which contained these epigrams, drew the attention of Germany to the Jena group, and hundreds of equally venomous shafts were, with less skill, directed at them. Goethe was stung into replying, but Schiller was reluctant to maintain the war, and the new satire was kept for *Faust* (Oberon and Titania's Wedding). Goethe himself soon came, as I said, to look upon such work as unworthy of their high ideals. They must, he urged, set their hands to creations which would of themselves shame the puny achievements of their opponents. Schiller concurred, and produced his *Wallenstein*. Goethe completed *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre* and wrote *Hermann und Dorothea*.

*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* had begun to take form on paper in 1776, and had grown, slowly and with long interruptions, until the middle of 1796, when it was completed. This extension over a period of twenty years gave the story a certain

## Goethe

advantage in workmanship, as the author ceased to write whenever the inspiration began to flag, but had the disadvantage of spoiling the initial unity of aim and construction. Goethe's ideals had been transformed during those twenty years. From the purely literary point of view the novel is, as Schiller and Schlegel at once pronounced it, superb. Its clear and pleasant characterisation, its vivid and easy narrative, and its skilful introduction of the most varied types of life, entitle it to the high praise it received. From the larger intellectual point of view, however, it suffers from a certain indecision, due to changes in the informing mind. In its first conception it was an autobiographical romance: the story of an artistic ambition breaking through the barriers raised about it by parents and circumstances. The change in Goethe's mood leaves it so indecisive in the latter part that commentators give many versions of its aim. It seems best to regard it, in its present form, as an objective creation without any moral aim.

The question whether, in view of its free treatment of sex-relations, it should be called moral or immoral may be answered by a distinction which will be found useful in many similar cases. In regard to nine commandments out of ten it is entirely moral; in regard to the tenth, it urges no theory of free love, but is written in a spirit of indifference to the accepted code. It is correct to describe such works as "non-moral" in the sense that the author ignores the requirements of the moralist, but the new phrase really contains little consolation for the

286

## Goethe and Schiller

moralist. Goethe probably had at that time much the same idea of him as he had of the theatrical manager.

In the first chapter I described the finding of an earlier version of the story, and referred to its strangely unflattering portrait of Wilhelm's mother. It was well known to biographers, even before this manuscript was discovered, that Goethe at first intended to make the story more strictly autobiographical than it actually is. The most notable departure from this first version is, as I said, the complete change in the character of Wilhelm's mother; every syllable of censure is erased, and all the goodness of the beloved grandmother is transferred to the mother. It seems impossible to interpret this in any other way than that, as all the other evidence suggests, he had little affection for his mother, possibly some dislike of her, until the middle of his life; then the maturing of his character and the loneliness of his mother softened his feeling, and her acceptance of Christiane induced him to abandon the last trace of resentment.

The next and greatest work of this happy period of Goethe's art was *Hermann und Dorothea*. Amongst his unfinished works was the fragment of an epic poem which he had begun in 1794. It seems that he had read an old narrative of the expulsion of Protestants from their village by the Bishop of Salzburg at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and was touched by a charming love-story which was framed in the troubles of the people. He at first thought of making a drama



## Goethe

of it; then, fresh from his experience of the French campaign, he decided to make it an epic poem describing such an incident of village life as the Germans fled before the French. Bielschowsky finds a second inspiration in the unhappy adventures of his earlier love, Lili. We saw how he had found her happily married to Herr von Turckheim at Strassburg. On her peaceful home the storm of the French advance fell with terrible fury, and it was wholly wrecked. The Terrorists in 1794 ordered the arrest of her husband, who had become mayor of the town, and he fled to Germany. Lili followed in disguise, and shared the hard fortune of so many fugitives. Whether, however, Goethe had heard her adventures, when he began the poem in 1794, is uncertain. It seems improbable, and the suggestion that his old love became warm again and pervades his poem—that Dorothea is Lili—is too speculative.

When *Wilhelm Meister* was finished he returned to *Hermann und Dorothea*, and poured into it the full flood of his new inspiration. He went to work at Jena in September, living, as he often did, in the old schloss, astonishing Schiller with his fertility. In nine days he composed about two-thirds of the poem, writing a hundred and fifty lines a day. When the stream ran more slowly he suspended the work, and made a journey to Leipsic and Dessau. He completed the poem in March. It adds nothing to his scanty expressions on the Revolution; he remains a grave, saddened spectator, awaiting the subsidence of the futile storm. But it places one

288

## Goethe and Schiller

more masterpiece in the gallery of his creations. For delicate characterisation, noble feeling, and simple objective description, it equals anything he had written; in diction, perhaps, it surpasses all the rest. At Jena he had not only taken up again the study of Homer, but he had devoted himself to the scientific study of language in the company of the philologists. This stern discipline of words in union with the fresh glow of poetic inspiration enabled him to reach his full stature once more, and touch the stars. The scenes are sculptured rather than written. Schiller said that the poem was "the culmination of his art and of all modern art," and less biased judges differ little from his verdict.

The elegies *Alexis and Dora* and *The New Pausanias*, the ballads *The Bride of Corinth* and *The God and the Bajadere*, are amongst the exquisite fruits of that golden age. He seemed to move in a spirit-world whose many enchanting forms imposed on him only the embarrassment of wealth. He even, under pressure from Schiller, reopened the parcel of detached papers which still represented *Faust*, and added a little. Then, to Schiller's regret, the wandering mood came over him, and he talked of going to Italy. He had some years before projected with Meyer a great comprehensive work on art, for which he must again carefully study the treasures of Italy. He had sent Meyer in advance in 1795. First the war, and then illness, had impeded Meyer, and he had retired to his native Switzerland. Goethe decided in the summer of 1797 to go to Switzerland, if not on to Italy.

## Goethe

He considered more gravely the risk of travelling in such troubled times than he had done the cannon-balls of the French, burned the greater part of his letters, and made his will. From his mother he easily obtained an assurance that she would respect his wish to leave everything to his family. Then he set out for Frankfort with Christiane and August. It is scarcely hazardous to assume that he took Christiane chiefly in order to disturb her associations in Weimar and bring her under his mother's influence. The disdain of the cultured had thrown Christiane upon the company of the coarser. Her strong sensuous nature could not endure cloistral retirement, and her passion for dancing led her to spend days and nights in the society to which she properly belonged. It seems to have been only in her later years that her indulgence in drink overcame her, but her portraits show her features rapidly coarsening, and Goethe's letters very plainly betray his want of trust in her.

It may be granted that there is no more difficult problem in Goethe's life than to discover his precise feeling for Christiane after the first year or two of possession. His letters to her are quoted with equal confidence by those who maintain that his love for her even increased with the years, and those who regard his union as a tragic blunder and a burden to him. His poems do not help us to decide, as they are open to quite contradictory interpretations. While one school even denies that Christiane is the beloved of the *Roman Elegies*, another recognises a tender portrait of her in Dora (whom, however,

290

## Goethe and Schiller

Heinemann takes to be Maddalena Riggi) and even in Dorothea. As far as poetic production is concerned, it seems to me that the years of barrenness before Goethe met Schiller are decisive against Christiane, and one must hesitate to see any direct inspiration from her in the poems of 1797. In regard to the letters it seems possible to hold an intermediate opinion. The almost parrot-like repetition of the phrase, "I love thee," is not the kind of language we have found in Goethe's real love-letters. When we find it often associated with a kind of argument—that Christiane must love him, or be faithful to him, in return—and when we find him making his way home with the most extraordinary leisureliness after assurances that he longs to be with her, and flying away again at the first pretext, we cannot see much depth in it. She had not lost all her attractiveness to him, and he loved their beautiful child; but her extreme uncultivation—she wrote German as only the most ignorant servant-girls write English to-day—and the persistent rumours of her giddiness, if not unfaithfulness, in his absence oppressed him.

Frau Goethe received her with warmth and an astonishing appreciation. Christiane was "an unspoiled creature of God," and had henceforth one cordial woman-friend above her own rank. She did not live in Frau Goethe's house, and she was soon sent back to Weimar, but from that time letters and presents reached her constantly from Frankfort. Goethe was pleased, and drew closer to his mother. "I said good-bye to my good mother," he wrote to

## Goethe

Christiane a fortnight later, "not without feeling;<sup>1</sup> this was the first time in many years that we had seen much of each other." He was now completely reconciled to her, and it will be found that all the statements by Frau Goethe about their earlier years were made after that date and were coloured by the later feeling, if not exaggerated by Bettina.

After a few days at Heidelberg and Stuttgart he went on to Zurich. The parsonage of Lavater, which he had once regarded as the chief shrine of Zurich, was closed to him by his *Xenien*, and it was equally impossible to restore the old friendship with Barbara Schulthess. He hastened to Meyer at Stafa, and travelled with him over the Forest Cantons. The journey very nearly gave us a fresh and masterly version of the legend of William Tell, as Goethe seriously meditated writing an epic on it. It was a fine September, and the mountain air and rich scenery braced him. He proposed to remain there until the spring, and then go either to Italy or France. Schiller, however, was pressing Meyer to dissuade him, and Christiane was causing anxiety. "Think of me," he writes, somewhat pitifully, to her, "and don't make eyes too much. It would be best not to do it at all; I have not done it during my whole journey. I think of thee alone and am bringing thee a nice muslin frock." Such pre-occupations struggled with the idea of a great epic and a monumental work on art in the mind of the

<sup>1</sup> The otherwise very conscientious and excellent American translator of Bielschowsky's work makes Goethe say that the parting had its "*deeply* affecting side." Goethe merely says: "Nicht ohne Rührung."

## Goethe and Schiller

first poet of Europe. He was persuaded to return, and he made his way slowly—one is almost tempted to say reluctantly—toward Weimar. He spent a superfluous week at Nuremberg, and did not reach home until November 20th. His movements seem more convincing than his assurances to Christiane that he was eager to be with her.

The following year did not sustain the wonderful fertility of 1797. He wrote a beautiful elegy, *Euphrosyne*, on the death of a singularly gifted young actress of the Weimar theatre, Christiane Neumann (Becker). She was a pretty and promising child of thirteen when, in 1791, Goethe had undertaken to educate her for the stage, and he had observed the blossoming of her gifts and charms with an affection that at times needed control. His elegy was a princely offering at the grave of the young actress. He meditated also a poem on the death of Achilles. But his chief occupation in 1798 was the founding of the *Propyläen*, an art-publication of a more or less periodical character. This was the alternative to his monumental work on art. As the Propylæa had introduced the Athenian to the treasures of the Parthenon, his journal was to lead Germany into the world of art, especially plastic art. Meyer co-operated intimately, and Schiller and Humboldt wrote a little, but the lack of public support soon left it stranded, with Schiller's *Horen* and other stately galleons, on the shore of the time.

In the course of the year he still further distracted his attention by purchasing an estate in the country,

## Goethe

at Oberrossla. He would master agriculture. For some years the innumerable trifles of agricultural life absorbed a good part of his time, until he sold the estate in 1803. He was also superintending the rebuilding of the palace, which was pressed forward in 1798, directing a number of museums, art-schools, and colleges in Weimar and Jena, and controlling the theatre. In this last work he now entered into a new and remarkable association with Schiller.

The amateur theatricals in which he had taken so lively a part when he first came to Weimar had been abandoned in favour of a professional troupe. In 1791, however, the leader of the troupe accepted an engagement elsewhere, and the Duke appointed Goethe director. A new theatre had been built, but the properties were still romantically slender and the players poor. There were a score of performers, and their qualities may fairly be estimated from the description of the company in *Wilhelm Meister*. Many of the curious details in that narrative—such as the need for an actress to take her part even in advanced pregnancy (though Goethe made her speak her part from the wings)—are taken from the experience at Weimar. Most of the players earned, in our coinage, from fifteen shillings to a pound a week; the prima donna, who had the additional duty of mistress to Karl August, received about a hundred pounds a year. To secure even this salary they had to rely on a “provincial tour” every summer. Most of the players preserved their native peculiarities of dialect and adopted the most naïve conceptions of art. The Jena students, who

## Goethe and Schiller

formed the most demonstrative part of the audience, found plenty of entertainment.

Out of this raw material Goethe made one of the best theatrical companies in Germany. Beginning with elementary lessons in pronunciation and articulation, he slowly took them through the whole curriculum of dramatic education. The smallest gestures of the leading actors were dictated by him, and any manifestation of reluctance or insubordination was punished with barrack-discipline. The audience, even the wild youths from Jena, were similarly coerced and educated. It should be added that he was extremely kind to the players, often asked them to his house, and won their deep attachment. The outcome of all this labour, however, was merely the better presentation of conventional drama and broad comedy, and Goethe resigned. Then, in 1798, Schiller's *Wallenstein* was produced, and the two poets perceived a new artistic power in the stage.

Iffland, the new manager, welcomed their co-operation, and for some years they devoted a close attention to the theatre. Schiller came to live at Weimar (December 1799), and the training of the actors and provision of a better repertoire became their chief task. The players were commanded to look to the ideal of beauty, instead of relying on the little tricks of voice and gesture which pleased an audience, and they were sternly drilled in its requirements. Prose was gradually abandoned, and only plays in verse were admitted. Goethe translated *Romeo and Juliet*, Voltaire's *Mahomet* and



## Goethe

*Tancred*, and other plays, while Schiller adapted Goethe's *Egmont* and *Tasso*, and provided a large and impressive repertoire. Their "mutilations" of Shakespeare have caused amusement in England, and it has been said that Goethe had no dramatic faculty. It would be more correct, perhaps, to say that he wished to change the purpose of drama. Just as, we saw, in writing his dramas he ignored the stage, so he now thought it the best use of the stage to serve literary art. The actors were to convey to the audience, with fitting dignity, exalted sentiments couched in noble language. He had also the more subtle and philosophical idea that the individual in a drama must be a type, not simply a personality. It is in the light of these views, and of his and Schiller's classical standard, that their alterations of Shakespeare were carried out. Goethe did not suppose that he was improving Shakespeare according to the best-received standard of drama. He was using the theatre for what he regarded as a higher purpose of artistic education. We may admit that the standard of drama which he would displace has a legitimate right to the theatre, that his own theory inevitably led to affectation, and that a standard set up in a little theatre where the management was completely indifferent to the wishes of the audience could not become a national standard, but we must also admit that those seven years of the partnership of Goethe and Schiller did much to elevate the German stage.

His preoccupation will explain the comparative emptiness of Goethe's literary record during the

296

## Goethe and Schiller

remaining years of Schiller's life. *Faust* advanced, and many papers on art were written, but the only outstanding productions in seven long years were *The Natural Daughter*, and a translation of Diderot's *Rameau's Niece* and of Benvenuto Cellini's autobiography. *The Natural Daughter* is a tragedy embodying Goethe's ideal of the use of the stage and the extreme limit of his classical ideal. It is not "marble smooth and marble cold," as some have said: the heroine, at least, is not without blood. But it carries to excess the idea of making each individual a type and the feeling for austerity of diction. It was conceived in 1799 and finished and presented in 1803. Goethe intended to deal in it with the French Revolution, but we find nothing more than suggestions of trouble behind the scenes. The unpleasant ending and what one may almost call the pedantry of the language confined the welcome of it to a few. The philosopher Fichte pronounced it Goethe's masterpiece.

The presence of Schiller in Weimar improved Goethe's social life. With Meyer, Schiller, and his boy's tutor Riemer he had a genial little circle, and he constantly entertained visitors. In 1801 he inaugurated a literary society of men and women, including Lotte Schiller, Fräulein von Göchhausen, and the brilliant Countess Henriette von Egloffstein, which met at his house every week, and there were romantic breakfasts and festivities at the house of one or other member. Unfortunately, these pleasant years were repeatedly troubled with pain and illness. He spent more

## Goethe

and more time away from home, and we have a somewhat pitiful letter from Christiane asking him to come and work at home. "You can dictate in bed as you do at Jena," she says, "and I will not disturb you in the morning before you wish." The brilliant company, in which she never appeared, must have irked her. Goethe was seriously ill in 1801, and Schiller expressly ascribes his poor health to his "miserable domestic circumstances." On the other hand, Christiane earned his gratitude by her care of him in illness, and the immediate death of their next three children (in 1791, 1795 and 1802) must have increased his sympathy for her.

With this ill-health and trouble of Goethe we may connect one or two incidents which are sometimes quoted in depreciation of his character. One is that he threatened to resign his connection with the theatre if a certain criticism of it by Böttiger were published. The more important incident occurred in 1802. The actor Kotzbue was piqued at being excluded from the brilliant circle over which Goethe and Schiller presided, and he attempted to break it. With some of the ladies who had turned against Goethe he arranged a dramatic festivity in honour of Schiller, and the preparations and rehearsals for it were the topic of Weimar. It attracted all the feeling that had accumulated against Goethe and Christiane. It was in part a demonstration against Goethe, and there can be little doubt that its promoters hoped to make a breach in the noble fellowship of the two poets. Had Schiller been a stronger man, he would have sternly suppressed the whole

298

## Goethe and Schiller

demonstration. As it was, he merely said privately that he would not attend the festivity, and it was left to Goethe to say a word to the authorities, who refused the use of the hall. He might, in healthier years, have smiled at the mischief-makers; in any case he was justified in resenting their aim.

The succeeding years brought fresh trouble and distress. In 1803 Herder died, unreconciled. Herder did not confirm his son August in 1802, as is sometimes said. He requested Herder to do so, but the records show that a subordinate cleric performed the ceremony. They rarely met, and a few months before his death Herder closed even this very cool intercourse between them. The conversation fell on Goethe's *Natural Daughter*, and Herder was so ill-advised as to say: "I prefer your natural son." Goethe walked away in silent distress, and they never saw each other again. Another and very grave source of anxiety was occupying him at the time. The able professors who had taught under him at Jena University were gradually enticed to wealthier universities, and he had the task of replacing a brilliant group with slender means. One of the migrating professors, Schütz, had taken with him the *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*, which was a journal of great prestige to Jena and an excellent means of supplementing the salaries of the professors. Wearily, and with a bitter feeling against wealthy Prussia—which even endeavoured to remove Schiller from him—he set to work to replace the professors and create a new journal (the *Jenaische Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*). "I envy

## Goethe

him," he said sadly, when he heard of Herder's death in December. He was in this mood when, just afterwards, Madame de Staël came to Weimar to interview him, so that her impression—"when you can get him to talk he is admirable"—is of no value.

The year 1805 broke heavily and sombrely. Both Goethe and Schiller were seriously ill, wondering which of the two the hovering shade of death would select first. Schiller recovered a little, and, coming to his friend's house, fell into his arms. It looked as if the older man was doomed. By the beginning of May, however, both were again in grave condition. It became clear that Schiller was dying, and Goethe wept and sank under the burden of his own illness. Schiller died on May 9th. No one had the courage to tell Goethe, but he noticed that Meyer avoided him, and he concluded that Schiller was worse. On the following day he gathered his strength to ask, and they told him that Schiller was dead. The noblest affection of his life and the rich promise of their artistic brotherhood were prematurely shattered. He passed in his turn, caring little, under the shadow of the cypresses, but devoted friends and the care of Christiane recalled him to life, and he returned to face the strange new world which the victories of Napoleon had created about him.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE SHADOW OF NAPOLEON

THE loss of Schiller marks a definite phase in the life of Goethe. He and others thought, indeed, that he would speedily follow the younger poet to the grave, but the kindly encouragement of Professor Wolf, who now became an intimate friend, a few weeks in the quiet country at Lauchstädt, and a fortnight in the Hartz Mountains with Wolf, restored him to health. He had still twenty-six years of life before him, and they were to be years of crowded life. He has said of the two parts of *Faust* that the first tells of a "lust for pleasure," the second of a "lust for deeds." It is a characterisation of his life. "Work" gradually becomes his supreme personal ideal. Yet these last twenty-six years of his life are shortened for the biographer by the monotony of settled habits, and may be described in comparatively brief space.

Broadly speaking, the period falls into two unequal parts. The first and longer part, a stretch of nearly twenty years, represents what one may almost call a second youth in the life of the great poet. Once more the fresh faces of maidens stir his blood, his heart throbs again with the energy of passion, and in his seventy-fourth year we shall find him seeking the hand of a girl of nineteen. The second and shorter phase is the conscious

## Goethe

autumn of his life, when he calmly sees the oldest companions of his manhood summoned one by one to the chamber of death, and gravely prepares his last and most solemn message to the world which he must soon leave. But the long period of his rejuvenescence may well be divided into two parts. The first part is overshadowed and defined by the European activity of Napoleon and closes with Waterloo and the peace.

From his restoring travels in the summer of 1805 Goethe returned to Weimar, at the beginning of September, to resume his work. There was no inspiration for large work. *Faust* was laid aside once more, for the twentieth time, and the plan of a continuation of *Wilhelm Meister* had to be postponed. A time of trouble was breaking. He came home to find Prussian troops making their way across Thuringia. Prussia was, however, still neutral in relation to Napoleon; the slight shadow of war soon passed away, and Goethe took up again the even course of his life.

The early part of the day was spent in the severely furnished little rooms which served his personal needs: the small bedroom and plain study, with its two wooden chairs, with which every visitor to Weimar is now familiar. When he did not wish to dictate in bed, he rose at seven. At eight his writer came to the study, and Goethe, walking about the room or standing erect with his hands clasped behind him, dictated the lines or the essays he had prepared. With a cup of chocolate—he detested coffee since his illness at Leipsic—at eleven, he

## The Shadow of Napoleon

worked until one. He dined at two with his secretary, his boy's tutor, and usually a friend or two. He never dined alone; conversation, dinner and wine were equally important, and the prettiest devices were sometimes used to stimulate and direct the conversation. As this was the one meal of the day, Goethe ate generously, and would then sit talking over the wine, which he appreciated. After his fiftieth year he took little exercise; he ceased to ride and rarely walked. From five to eight he was at the theatre, or entertained friends at home, or played dummy whist with Christiane and her companion. A very light supper was then served, and he went to bed at ten.

The severity of this scheme, however, relaxed when no important work was in hand. Karl August came to the study when he willed. The Duchess Luise, with whom he was now united by great mutual affection, and other members of the ducal house, came on certain days to talk or to be instructed. At the time of Schiller's death a circle of ladies met at his house on Wednesdays from ten to one, generally to hear scientific papers by Goethe. The Princess Caroline, Karl August's youngest daughter, and Frau von Stein, who had returned to friendship, belonged to this little society. The meetings were held again when he returned to Weimar in 1805. These gatherings took place, like the dinners, in the large rooms in the front part of the house, which were richly decorated with pictures and casts of sculpture. Christiane was rarely seen on such occasions, and would hardly regret it. One



## Goethe

day in 1805 Goethe entertained Wieland and Jacobi and his sister. Christiane sat at table with them, and Schiller's widow afterwards wrote to a friend: "The *Vulpia* was present. Wieland says that Goethe paid tender attention to her; that is either a lie, or else he must have some analogy with the girl's nature."

The winter passed peacefully, though the new year opened with foreboding. Prussia had begun to distrust Napoleon. In June Goethe went to Karlsbad, where two months' pleasant social life, geological study of the district and painting of landscapes completed his restoration to health. In July he received the diploma of membership of the Berlin Academy of Science; in August he heard that Prussia was advancing against Napoleon; and men spoke with bated breath of the shock of his mighty armies. He saw Karl August in camp at Niederrossla, and must have discussed with him the contingency of defeat. By the middle of October the avalanche was thundering toward Jena, and there was a general flight from the town. Only the Duchess Luise remained in the palace, ready even to meet Napoleon, and Goethe waited anxiously in his house. In the early morning of October 14th the roar of the cannons was heard in the direction of Jena; in the afternoon the storm broke over Weimar itself, through which the Prussians were retreating. Goethe walked in his garden, while the iron balls whistled through the air and shattered the houses about him. What would now become of his beloved duchy?

## The Shadow of Napoleon

Presently the advance guard of the French rattled into the streets, and by evening 40,000 troops were quartered in the town and eager to pillage it. Sixteen hussars were lodged in Goethe's house, but a young Alsatian officer of the hussars assured him that his house would not be looted; it had been chosen for the marshal. The young officer was the son of his old love, Lili Turkheim. The hussars were well behaved, and Goethe's house enjoyed comparative peace, while on every side the flames of burning houses lit up the orgies and looting of the French troops. About midnight, however, two drunken soldiers forced their way in. Goethe had to come, at their demand, and drink with them, and they afterwards broke into his bedroom. Christiane struggled to protect him, and had them at last dragged from the room, and they slept as well as they could through the terrible night. On the morrow Marshal Ney called at the house, and a guard was set about it. Marshal Augereau then made the house his head-quarters for a day or two, and the town was rid of disorder. After a few days General Jentzel, an old Jena student and an admirer of the poet, was left in command at Weimar, and Goethe had merely to entertain a not uncongenial guest, Denon, the Parisian inspector of arts and museums, whose acquaintance Goethe had made in Italy, and find quarters for a number of soldiers. The short experience cost Goethe more than a year's salary.

We need not consider the ill-natured comments of critics who dwell on the fact that Goethe con-

## Goethe

trived to suffer less than most of his neighbours during the occupation of Weimar. The French generals owed it to their own honour to protect the security of the greatest writer in Europe, and they did so. The only use that Goethe made of his influence was to beg the intervention of Denon for his institutes of science and art. Napoleon was enraged against Karl August for what he regarded as his treachery, and there seemed to be a prospect that the University of Jena and other institutions on which he had expended so much devotion might be ruined. Goethe made no sacrifice of his loyalty to the Duke. He warmly defended his conduct against Napoleon's censures; though we must read with some discretion the statement of Falk that he threatened to turn strolling ballad-singer and "sing Napoleon off his throne." The report of his words may be rhetorically exaggerated. Yet he undoubtedly resisted Napoleon's anger, and begged Denon to plead the life of his beloved institutions. He had the happiness of reopening the university and the Weimar institutes within a month, and the theatre was reopened in the following year.

No doubt Napoleon respected Goethe's plea, but, as is well known, it was the Duchess Luise who disarmed him by her splendid behaviour. The Duke retreated to the frontier, loyally conceiving that he must not submit to the French without the permission of Prussia. It was Luise who, at the top of her palace-steps, calmly met the terrible conqueror and defended her husband. Prussia gave a formal assent to his submission, and peace

306

## The Shadow of Napoleon

was concluded in December. Karl August was to join the Rhine Confederation, supply troops for Napoleon's wars, and pay an indemnity of 2,200,000 francs. He returned in January to Weimar to brood over the distress of his humiliated duchy.

Meantime Goethe had married Christiane. There is in the disturbed condition of the times so clear a reason for this step that we need not seek any other. At the most we may suppose that the devotion which Christiane had shown in his successive illnesses and the death of the later children may have disposed him the more readily to take it. He must have taken it with great reluctance, from a strong sense of duty. Christiane was less fitted than ever to be his wife. Awkward in a drawing-room, and at home only in such functions as a students' dance, more interested in wine than in culture, she was a most incongruous figure to share the throne of the monarch of German letters. Goethe reflected only that she had given herself to him, and was the mother of his son. He married her on Sunday, October 19th, in the sacristy of the Court chapel. That he had intended to marry her some years before is merely the unreliable statement of her brother, and most improbable; but we may equally demur to the statement that he was "too weak" to sever his connection. I regard his marriage as an act of moral strength. He would not again wound the heart of a woman, and if Christiane was to stay, she must be in a legally secure position.

With equal firmness he then endeavoured to force the ladies of Weimar to recognise her new position.

## Goethe

In this he sought the assistance of Johanna Schopenhauer, mother of the famous philosopher, who then lived at Weimar with her daughters and held "literary teas" in her house. She consented, and Christiane, nervous and awkward, was suddenly presented to the assembled ladies of her house as Frau von Goethe. Goethe was present, and they affected politeness, but Christiane never obtained more than formal recognition. She was never taken to Court. She visited and received visitors at her teas, but Frau von Stein wrote to her son that she merely visited "the creature" to please Goethe, and Frau von Schiller spoke of her in one tone to Goethe and quite another tone to her friends. Other matrons of Weimar told each other a legend, which long survived in the town, that Napoleon had seen Goethe before the battle of Jena and ordered him to marry, and that when the roar of the guns approached on October 14th he hastened to church with her. This curious story seems to be founded only on the fact—frankly, a mysterious fact—that the wedding-rings bore the date October 14th. The natural inference is that Goethe had intended to marry on that date, but the occupation forced him to postpone it for a few days. Once more Goethe's mother surpassed all in generosity of judgment. "Thou canst thank God," she wrote to her son, when Christiane again visited her in 1807; "such a dear, glorious, unspoiled creature of God is rarely to be found!"

The most ironical feature of Goethe's marriage is that almost from that time he recovered his

308

## The Shadow of Napoleon

adolescent fondness for maidens of tender years, and in proportion as Christiane lost her attractiveness and increased her indulgence in drink, his heart seemed to become more and more susceptible. The year opened sadly for all of them at Weimar. In April the Duchess Amalia, broken in spirit by the sufferings of her house, ended her days. Goethe moved to Karlsbad in May, and remained there the whole summer. He began the continuation of *Wilhelm Meister*, and entered cheerfully into the social life of the famous watering-place. The French envoy Reinhard became a lifelong friend; Princess Bagration, a beautiful and charming woman, drew him into her circle, and Prince Ligne and other distinguished men talked with him. Karl August also was there, and the months passed merrily and industriously. In September he returned to Weimar, but the work on his new books induced him to go on to Jena and take up his old residence there. His old friend Knebel lived at Jena with his family, and Goethe was friendly also with the bookseller Frommann.

In the house of Frommann was a pretty and winning young orphan named Wilhelmine Herzlieb. Goethe had seen her grow from a bright little child of ten into the amiable, ingenuous young woman of eighteen, with handsome face and rounded figure, which she was in the autumn of 1807. As she approached the age, or that springtime of growth, in which so many maidens had won his heart, his feeling became more tender than paternal, and he approached her with less liberty. Minnchen, as she

## Goethe

was generally called, or Minna, as she signed her letters, loved and admired Goethe in her frank maidenly way, and does not seem ever to have suspected, even to the end, that he came to love her "more than was proper," as he afterwards said to his wife. He worked strenuously at *Wilhelm Meister*, having changed his plans in favour of that novel, until the beginning of December. Then the poet Werner came to Jena, and was introduced by Goethe to the Frommanns. From the lively meetings which were held in the bookseller's house there was gradually developed a poetical contest. Werner, Goethe, Riemer and Knebel vied with each other in sonnets, and the subject of Goethe's ardent lines was the innocent Minna.

When we take together the ardent language of these sonnets and Goethe's own confession that he loved Minna "more than was fitting," we may at once conclude that he returned for an hour to his earlier Epicurean theory of love. He desired nothing that must pass the stern tribunal of the moralist; he felt only the exquisite sentiment of loving her, and would enjoy it. Nor was there any dangerous passion on her part. She wrote of him to her friends as a "dear old gentleman," and with perfect candour described her mingled feeling of affection and reverence. Goethe was recalled to Weimar after a week or two of this exhilarating life, and Minna left Jena for some years a few months afterwards; but Goethe had been too deeply affected to dismiss the sentiment lightly from his heart. Even two years later he met her with some embarrassment,



WILHELMINE HERZLIEB



## The Shadow of Napoleon

and his love of her forms the inspiration of his important novel, *The Elective Affinities*.

The story which is expanded in the *Elective Affinities* was at first intended to form one of the incidental stories in *Wilhelm Meister*, but the flood of his new emotional experience passed so naturally into it that he resolved to make it a large novel. He wrote it in the summer of 1808. In the following year he read the manuscript once more, was dissatisfied with it, and entirely re-wrote it during four months of hard work and complete isolation at Jena. From the literary point of view its extreme beauty and severity of style are somewhat marred by a tendency to complicate, even to obscure, the narrative, which we shall find growing in Goethe's later years. Here, however, it must be considered only from the biographical point of view. In this respect it is extremely interesting, since its obvious moral, as Goethe said, is the duty of renunciation when inclination conflicts with the moral sense. A man and woman who have entered upon a dispassionate marriage take two persons into their establishment: an attractive young niece and a friend of the husband. At once the husband discovers a passion for the niece, and the wife for the friend. As there are no children, the husband proposes divorce and fresh marriages, but a child is born, and the story ends in general misery. The niece, who accidentally drowns the child, starves herself to death: the husband also commits suicide.

This story is biographically interesting in many regards. It shows the depth of Goethe's feeling

## Goethe

for Minna Herzlieb, it shows the shallowness of his feeling for Christiane, and, in my profound conviction, it shows his antipathy to marriage. Here I again differ from most of the leading biographers, and may seem to favour a censorious school whose whole attitude I detest. Bielschowsky finds in the novel a "glorious defence of marriage"; Heinemann, observing that it makes people expiate by death even a sin in thought only, regards it as supremely moral. Goethe himself resented the charge that it ~~was~~ immoral. To me it seems profoundly moral, but none the less a deadly attack on marriage as it was then in Germany and is now in England. "It is not immoral," Goethe said, "but it must be judged from a larger point of view"; and Heinemann concludes that the lesson of the story is that "it is not the Church's blessing, but the love of the married pair, which makes marriage moral." That is the language of most writers who claim less stringency in sex relations. The horrible disaster which Goethe brings upon the four characters *precisely because* they will not divorce and re-marry is a poor recommendation of the conventional idea. The glowing eulogy of indissoluble marriage which Bielschowsky finds in the work is really put by Goethe in the mouth of a muddle-headed Philistine; the ensuing calamity seems to be Goethe's comment on it. Larger freedom, ampler power of divorce is the plain moral of the book. Renunciation is a secondary or personal moral. Given an order of things in which a man must choose between inclination and duty, he must

## The Shadow of Napoleon

learn to renounce. But the larger or social conclusion, when renunciation is depicted in so saturnine a guise, is that the state of things which imposes it is wrong. I may add that three smaller stories within the novel enforce the same lesson.

Goethe unites with the *Elective Affinities* the drama *Pandora* as having the same moral, renunciation. He had gone to Jena in the autumn of 1807 for the purpose of writing this drama, so that, although his love of Minna Herzlieb did lend some poignancy to the element of renunciation in it, it was conceived and partly written before his passion began. There is biographical significance in this praise of renunciation which comes to his lips so promptly after his marriage. He has married from a sheer sense of duty against his inclination. However, as *Pandora* takes us into the remote and mythical atmosphere of Greece, the more human moral hardly arises from it. The play is primarily a glorification, in the Greek spirit, of the good, the true and the beautiful; it is an early embodiment of the lesson of *Meister* and *Faust*—self-control, work, altruism. It was finished (as far as it is finished) at Karlsbad in 1808.

Before he went to Karlsbad, however, Goethe had another and even more romantic association with a young girl. We remember his earlier friendship with Frau Laroche and his tender relations with her newly-married daughter, Maximiliane Brentano. He was now to have a singular and embarrassing experience with the third generation. Bettina Brentano, daughter of Maximiliane, is well

## Goethe

known for her *Letters of Goethe to a Child*, a work in which she represents herself as corresponding with the aged poet in terms of passionate, almost hysterical, devotion, and receiving ample encouragement from him during a number of years. Lewes has admirably shown that these letters are largely fiction, and must be read with entire reserve. They will hold a high place in the category of impassioned love-letters, but their claim to have actually passed in that form between Goethe and "the child" is discredited. One may regard Goethe's letters to her as substantially genuine. They are restrained, playful, paternal and indulgent. She is an "amiable child," and her vivid and exalted strain makes him hesitate whether he shall call her "odd or wonderful." But that he allowed her to address him as "My Wolfgang" and "Goethe," and in other terms which carry familiarity to the pitch of impudence, we may decline to believe. For the moment we are concerned only with her account of his reception of her at Weimar in 1808.

Bettina was—we may adopt both Goethe's epithets—an odd and wonderful little woman. She was not a child when she first saw Goethe; she had been born in 1785. She had, however, the very curious aspect of an old-fashioned child, a precociously keen and sensitive young woman. Her portrait suggests a dark, neurotic, eerie-looking girl, instead of a fully developed woman. The great name of Goethe was a tradition in her home, and in that of her grandmother, with whom she lived when her mother died. When she grew up she

## The Shadow of Napoleon

struck acquaintance with Goethe's mother, and the injudicious old lady encouraged her morbid and romantic imagination to the fullest. I may note, in passing, that it is from Bettina's poetical accounts of their conversations that writers on Goethe's mother derive all their information about the early relations of mother and son. Bettina naturally longed to see her idol and Frau Goethe encouraged.

She came to Weimar in April 1808, in her twenty-third year, and introduced herself as the daughter of Maximiliane and granddaughter of Frau Laroche. Goethe seems to have been so struck with her vivacity, her stormy admiration, and her remarkably vivid literary power that he received her in the most friendly way, and corresponded with her afterwards. But that Goethe at once pressed her to his heart, as she says, and that, when she found the sofa uncomfortable, he invited her to sit on his knee and allowed her to sleep there, is not a plausible story, and, since much of her narrative is known to be fiction, it may be disregarded. No doubt he thought that she was "the child" she professed to be, and he was indulgent. We shall see in a later year how sharply he dismissed her when she came into conflict with Christiane.

The summer was spent, as usual, at Karlsbad, where Goethe found himself "very happy." He finished the first version of *Elective Affinities* and *Pandora*, rid himself of the gout which threatened, and enjoyed the brilliant company. The Duchess of Courland and other noble dames entertained him. One of the friends from his Roman circle,

## Goethe

Bury, came in the course of the summer, and there were always men of distinction at Karlsbad in June and July. It is clear, however, that one of Goethe's most pleasant distractions was taking walks with pretty and charming maidens, such as Silvie von Ziegesar. Her father, an ex-minister of Gotha, had a house near Jena, and Goethe was friendly with the family. He had seen Silvie grow up from childhood, and, as the family was staying at Karlsbad in 1808, he made it one of his chief pleasures to take walks with Silvie and her girl friends. They went on to Franzensbrunn, and Goethe followed, and spent another fortnight with them. We have a number of letters which he wrote to Silvie. They are in no sense love-letters, but they show a warm regard for her.

On his return to Weimar in September he learned that his mother had died. He had not seen her since 1797, but he had undoubtedly become attached to her in her later years, and the loss distressed him. He sent Christiane to arrange about his inheritance at Frankfort, as events of grave importance now confined him to Thuringia. The Tsar and Napoleon and half the princes of Europe were to meet at Erfurt at the end of September. Goethe had no duty to perform there, and had no inclination to go, but Karl August pressed him.

We know from the French side that Napoleon was anxious to meet such men as Goethe. With his brilliant army and his Court of forty kings and princes, he could daze the Tsar and overawe lesser monarchs; he wanted also, as he said, "to stir the

## The Shadow of Napoleon

men with melancholic ideas who abound in Germany." Napoleon knew the power of the free pen, and shrewdly feared the "idealists" of Germany. Possibly he knew of Goethe's aloofness from politics; possibly he had a larger share than is generally believed in securing that Goethe should take no part in the nationalist movement which would soon threaten his power in Germany. In any case he would meet with interest the author of *Werther*—he had read the novel seven times—and chief adviser of that thorny and suspected prince, the Duke of Weimar.

On October 2nd Goethe was summoned to Napoleon's presence. The Emperor was breakfasting; Talleyrand stood by him. When Napoleon looked up, he seems to have been surprised and impressed by the splendid appearance that Goethe still preserved. "You are a man," he exclaimed. Goethe may have thought with pride of the crowd of princes without, whom Napoleon despised; he knew, at least, that there was no banality in the expression, and he bowed. We have only a slender account of the conversation that followed. Talleyrand, singularly enough, left no record of it, and, although he had Goethe to dinner with him afterwards, gives us no impression of him. They talked of the drama and of *Werther*, and parted in mutual admiration. "There's a man for you," Napoleon said to Daru. Goethe went away so impressed with Napoleon's power that he had not the least faith in the later German revolt against him.

## Goethe

Napoleon sent his Court and the Parisian opera company on to Weimar, and during a ball had another conversation with Goethe. As Napoleon's ideas on the drama are not of great importance, it will be enough to note that Goethe afterwards wrote to his friend Sulpiz Boisserée that Napoleon was "the greatest intellect the world had ever seen." The two greatest men in Europe were not disappointed in each other. It is probable, however, that Goethe was attuned to generosity by the Emperor's treatment of the duchy, and we may surmise that his admiration of Goethe counted for something in the settlement, as he regarded Karl August with suspicion. He gave 300,000 francs to repair the ravages of war at Jena, and he relieved the duchy from its duty to contribute troops for the Spanish war. To Goethe and Wieland he presented the Cross of the Legion of Honour, and he pressed Goethe to make a long stay at Paris.

The four years which were to elapse before this might of Napoleon would be crushed between the forces of the east and the energy of England contain few episodes of interest in the life of Goethe. In the summer of 1809, as we saw, he secluded himself in Jena for four months, and re-wrote the *Elective Affinities*. He then applied himself to his *Theory of Colour* (*Farbenlehre*), which he completed in the following spring, and his autobiography, *Poetry and Truth*. Each summer was spent at one of the chief watering-places. It is of some interest that when he sent Christiane to Frankfort in the autumn of 1808, he told her to



## The Shadow of Napoleon

make plenty of friends, and to look out a small house in the town. "In this way," he says, "you would have a pleasant residence for part of the year, and we should be together for some time." The situation in Weimar evidently annoyed him; Christiane obtained only the most grudging and formal recognition, and the state of her health, which gave him concern, implies that she was slipping into the excesses which marred her later years. Their son August also gave him anxiety. He had inherited the sensual trait, without the strong will to control it. However, Christiane opposed the idea of leaving Weimar, and Goethe realised that it would be difficult to establish August in his native town, where the boy's birth would be discussed. "His baptismal certificate," Goethe said, "would either betray our earlier years or not square with the marriage certificate."

They continued to live in the Fauenenplan, Goethe seeking his annual consolation at Karlsbad or Teplitz, his wife passing the summer at Lauchstädt. In 1810 he spent nearly three months at Karlsbad, where he became very friendly with the Empress of Austria, and three months at Teplitz, with Louis Napoleon for neighbour. In the following year he ventured to take Christiane to Karlsbad, but the stratagem seems to have failed. He returned to Weimar much earlier than usual, and Christiane's position was unchanged. In 1807 Goethe had spoken of her to his friend Reinhard, the French envoy. "I will not describe her in the presence of your wife," he said; "she is of too aristocratic a

## Goethe

nature. For my wife my works are a dead letter; she has not read a line of them; the intellectual world does not exist for her. She is an excellent housewife." Frau Reinhard was in Weimar shortly afterwards, and, "in order to prove that she was not so exclusive," called on Christiane. "In appearance," she reported, "she is ordinary, not to say common, but she seems to have a good character." It was hardly likely that Goethe should enforce such a wife on aristocratic Karlsbad. In fact, the year 1811 brought him additional trouble. It seems that she had quarrelled with Frau von Schiller before they went to Karlsbad, and after their return she had a public quarrel with Bettina which long formed a topic in Weimar.

Bettina and her husband, von Arnim, came to Weimar in August, and were entertained several times by Goethe. For more than a week, we gather from his diary, Bettina clung to him, and passed hours talking to him. We can imagine her posing as his beloved daughter and exciting the jealousy of Christiane. At last there was a public quarrel between the two women, and Goethe forbade Bettina the house and refused to correspond further with her. The most reliable version of the story is that Christiane was angered by Bettina's criticisms of Meyer in the picture gallery, and they exchanged some very strong epithets. Goethe was little blamed for taking his wife's part, but the "appalling chatter" which followed, as Frau von Schiller says, must have pained him. "I am glad to be rid of the fools," he said later of the Arnims. Weimar gener-



BETTINA BRENTANO

## The Shadow of Napoleon

ally concluded that the quarrel would not have occurred but for Christiane.

He took Christiane again to Karlsbad in 1812, but left her there while he spent several pleasant weeks at Teplitz in some intimacy with the Empress of Austria. He used to read his poems to her, and received from her when she left a gold snuff-box set with brilliants. He also met Beethoven at Teplitz, but the two artists were too widely removed in character to become friends. The story of their different behaviour when they met a distinguished company is typical, if not wholly true; Beethoven thrust his hat more firmly on his head, Goethe lifted his hat, stood aside, and bowed. Such courtesy to princes seemed to him so natural and fitting that he disliked Beethoven, and when the musician made an urgent appeal to him in later years, he ignored it. We know their difference of feeling from their letters, whether the above story be true or not.

The year 1813 opened with another ominous depression of the political barometer. The Grand Army was retreating from Russia in deadly confusion and distress; Wellington was sweeping the French out of Spain; Austria was preparing to secede from the enforced alliance with Napoleon. The cry was raised, and at length rang throughout Germany, that the hour had come to break their chains and restore the liberty of the fatherland. Prussia cast off its yoke, and, in alliance with Russia, pressed once more toward Thuringia. By April their troops occupied the heights overlooking Weimar, and the little town shudderingly expected

## Goethe

another onfall of the avalanche of war. Goethe was persuaded to bury his treasures and go to Teplitz. He found it "a sort of purgatory in which half-damned souls tortured each other." He listened impatiently to their hopes and fears, and worked steadily at his autobiography. He then went to Dresden, and lost the friendship of the patriotic Körners by telling them that they would not shake off their chains, but find them fastened deeper in their flesh. In October Napoleon was defeated at Leipsic, and Weimar became a hospital station for the retreating French. Inch by inch the invincible regiments were driven toward their frontier, and the patriotic fever became more intense. Still Goethe shook his head; he had an ineffaceable impression of Napoleon's strength. When Karl August raised a volunteer regiment and his son joined, Goethe begged the Duke to dismiss him, as he needed August to do secretarial work in the absence of Riemer.

It is futile to plead that Goethe did really need his son's assistance in his literary work. A convinced and ardent patriot might have sacrificed, or suspended for a month or two, in such a crisis, the writing of his autobiography. But it is equally futile to quarrel with Goethe for not having been a convinced and ardent patriot. Three things explain or justify what is called his cold indifference to the fortunes of his nation in that historic year. First, he was convinced that Napoleon would win, and that the result would be to change his enlightened administration of Europe into a vindictive oppres-

## The Shadow of Napoleon

sion. Secondly, he was afraid that Austria and Russia would not retire peacefully within their frontiers if they helped Germany to rid itself of the rule of Napoleon; and he believed that the rule of Napoleon was more humane than their influence would be. Thirdly, he could not discover the "fatherland" of which the younger German poets sang. Politically, there was then no such country as Germany. In any future consolidation of the multitude of States, moreover, Prussia would be the strongest and most dominant element; and he detested and distrusted Prussia. Its idea of promoting culture was to use its wealth to attract the professors whom other universities trained and the journals they founded. If we further recollect his cultural cosmopolitanism, his distrust of political agencies, his horror of violence, and his age, we can quite understand his attitude.

To Germans it is naturally a matter of deep disappointment that their greatest poet was silent when, in heroic struggle, the true foundations of their Empire were laid. Let the younger men sing your war-songs, he said, when his admirers looked to him for inspiring verses. Was he so little German, so purely classical, in feeling that the cry of his country could awake no echo in his breast? It is certain that he was in those years very moderately Germanic in feeling. Germany was not an Empire, and, apart from the Reformation, it had no past. He had studied the *Ring of the Nibelungs* with admiration, and had moderated his disdain for the Gothic. But it was not until a later year that—for

## Goethe

a time, at least—Sulpiz Boisserée and others deeply interested him in medieval art, and to the end of his life he placed classic art high above medieval. Germany, to him, was the city of Frankfort and the duchy of Weimar; it was easy to be cosmopolitan, not so easy for a great mind, advanced in years, to be patriotic. On the other hand, what was called the “yoke” of Napoleon gave promise of cultural progress and of the intellectual approach of nations, and these things Goethe desired above all. He was paralysed not by indifference to the lot of his countrymen, but by a high concern for it.

In the following year the tide of war rolled definitely off the shores of Germany. In the spring the reign of Napoleon was over. Goethe remained calm amidst the general rejoicing, glad only that the war was over. From Berlin he received an invitation to compose a piece in celebration of the triumph. He at first refused, and then it occurred to him that there was one message he would like to deliver to his country, and he wrote *The Awakening of Epimenides*. In a sense it is true that Epimenides is Goethe, but it is not at all true that the symbolical play is a confession of error. Epimenides is Germany, roused from its heavy slumbers by the message of peace and liberty, aspiring to use its new opportunity and resources for the development of culture and the happiness of its people. The calm dignity of the lines probably seemed to many, as they shouted the patriotic songs of younger men, too cold and inadequate to the occasion. In a few years they would cry that

## The Shadow of Napoleon

their new liberty was but another form of tyranny : that the rule of Prussia, Austria and Russia was as much despotic and benumbing as the rule of Napoleon. Europe was singing in the days of the White Terror and the Holy Alliance.



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE LAST FIRES OF LOVE

AFTER the fall of Napoleon the valleys of the Rhine and the Main, Goethe's native country, returned to their drowsy and pleasant tranquillity, and Goethe decided to go there for his long summer rest. He had not visited the west since his second stay in the Prussian camp in 1794. For twenty years the beautiful country had been shaken by the tread of armies, and lines of ruined homesteads still marked the last passage of Bellona. But the news of the fall of Napoleon, coming with the freshness of the spring, lit up again the spirits of the Rhinelanders, and Goethe found in abundance the refreshment and exhilaration which he needed. He reached Frankfort on July 28th, and passed to Wiesbaden on the following day. There he found his warm friend Zelter, the director of the Berlin Singing Academy, and made many excursions in the country. A touch of age had seemed to sadden him in the previous year. Wieland had followed Herder into the land of shades, and Goethe had survived the last horrors of the war only to find himself in very imperfect harmony with the subsequent rejoicing.

In his travels of 1814 and 1815 in the Rhine and Main region, of which he has left us a brief account,

## The Last Fires of Love

he recovered his youth and his power of love. From Wiesbaden he went at the beginning of September to the country-house of Franz Brentano, the step-brother of Bettina, one of the children whom he had helped Maximiliane to entertain at Frankfort forty years before. Franz had succeeded to his father's prosperity, had married the accomplished daughter of an Austrian statesman of artistic tastes, and had retained his step-mother's esteem for Goethe. Their house stood on an eminence on the banks of the Rhine, and many happy days were spent in excursions by land or water. Brentano, a Roman Catholic, belonged on the artistic side to the Romantic school, and endeavoured to moderate Goethe's antipathy to that school. When he passed to Frankfort, about the middle of September, he was surprised to find himself still in the same atmosphere. He was the guest of Fritz Schlosser (son of the youngest of the three Schlosser brothers he had known), and the second generation of the Schlossers had contracted the Romantic fever and were inclined to Catholicism. To their house came Sulpiz Boisserée, a Catholic and Romanticist whom Goethe greatly esteemed, and Goethe was invited to spend a week or two examining the very fine collection of medieval pictures which the Boisserée brothers had in their home at Heidelberg.

I do not note these things merely from a conscientious desire to follow all the movements of the great poet: a praiseworthy but injudicious desire which spoils half the biographies of Goethe. These details are biographically interesting, partly because

## Goethe

they show a preparation or quickening of his emotions for the love-story which follows, and partly because they prove that Goethe's mature verdict on Romanticism was not passed without knowledge and even sympathetic study. The cry of "return to the Middle Ages" was spreading throughout Europe in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and half the foreign writers whom Goethe considered to be of promise and eminence—say, Scott, Victor Hugo, and Manzoni—to say nothing of German writers and artists, echoed it. Goethe listened dispassionately to the claims of his Catholic friends; he knew that there might be anti-Christian bias in the pagan just as there was Christian bias in the Romanticist, and he wished to form a pure artistic judgment. He remained a fortnight at Heidelberg, and studied his friends' old German and old Dutch paintings very minutely, with their enthusiastic assistance. Every morning, from eight to twelve, was spent in the gallery. In this state of narrow absorption, and after living for so many weeks in a Catholic atmosphere, he persuaded himself that this old medieval art was admirable, but the feeling had no firm basis in his intelligence. Such painters as Rembrandt and Rubens, of course, he fully appreciated, but a few hours spent afterwards among the plaster casts of ancient sculpture at Darmstadt quickly restored in his mind the immeasurable supremacy of classical art.

He returned to Frankfort in October, refreshed and stimulated by the sunny scenery of Rhineland and the long series of evenings devoted to discus-

## The Last Fires of Love

sion of art. His health was completely restored, his sense-life invigorated, his sensibility quickened. In this mood he met Marianne Willemer, the last but one of the long line of his youthful loves. During his short stay at Frankfort in September he had made friendly acquaintance with the banker and councillor Johann Jakob von Willemer, who had a pleasant country-house on the Main at Gerbermühle, near Offenbach. Willemer was a wealthy and cultivated man of fifty-four, but one may question whether he would have returned to Goethe's thoughts if he had not had in his house a pretty and charming ward named Marianne Jung. He had taken her from the theatre, of which he was a director, in her fifteenth year in order to save her from the career which the lower operatic world promised her. A widower with several daughters, he took Marianne into his family, and had her educated with his own girls.

When Goethe visited them in September, Marianne had become a very attractive little brunette in her twenty-first year, with clear engaging eyes, a pleasant and energetic manner, a frame in which robust health was united with fineness and delicacy of sentiment, and musical and poetical gifts of some distinction. She was the light of the widower's home, and, as his daughters had now gone, she was betrothed to him. When Goethe returned in October she was Marianne Willemer, a change which seems to have added charm to her appearance and gifts. He remained in Frankfort for a week, and saw much of Marianne. They were "very

## Goethe

merry " together, he says, spending sometimes nearly the whole day in each other's company. The circumstance that she had been rescued from a ballet-troupe must not be allowed to prejudice us. She seems to have acted with moderate discretion throughout, and merely taken a very natural pride in the flattering attentions of one whom Frankfort now regarded as the most illustrious of its children, one who was the friend of empresses and princesses.

In the following summer (1815) Goethe decided to return to the west for his holiday. Napoleon's desperate effort to recover the throne of Europe deterred him for a time, but he ventured to Wiesbaden in May, and remained there for six weeks. Minister von Stein invited him to spend a few days in his Nassau castle, and, after spending a week or two in an atmosphere of politics and diplomacy (which he breathed with difficulty) and an excursion to Cologne and appreciation of its glorious cathedral, he returned to Wiesbaden. Once more he expressed so great a pleasure with his stay in the Rhine district that his friends—chiefly Franz Brentano's wife and von Stein—conspired to transplant him thither for the rest of his days.

He was therefore again wholly attuned to agreeable impressions when, in the middle of July, he accepted an invitation to stay with the von Willemers at Gerbermühle. He went, accompanied by Boisserée, with the intention of staying a week; he stayed altogether about four or five weeks, and had at length to be warned by the conscientious young wife

## The Last Fires of Love

that they must part. Once more he conceived a passion as ardent as any of his younger days, cherished it as an exquisite experience which ought not to incur moral censure, and at length embodied it in a great poem.

The house at Gerbermühle was itself pleasant and attractive. It was encircled by large shady trees, cutting it off from the world, and the clear cool river washed the foot of its garden. One might sit on the verandah and look out over the country which had been dear to Goethe in his boyhood, or stroll down to Offenbach with all its happy memories, or sail lazily down the stream as he had been wont to do with Cornelia and her friends. At night the cool air from the water refreshed them, and the fine musical talent of Marianne entertained them. One would hardly call her a beautiful girl, but her happy blend of health and delicacy, sensuousness and refinement and wit, captivated the still youthful heart of the poet. His affection transfigured her. Like many men of great intellectual power, he was happier in the company of a fresh and gifted young woman than he had been in the company of von Stein and his distinguished political friends or in learned discourse on the principles of art with the Boisserées, and the young woman could not but perceive the homage. He was a guest whom it was a unique privilege of their house to entertain. His sixty-sixth birthday occurred during the early part of his stay with them, and all Frankfort came to pay him reverence, a deeper and warmer reverence than they would pay to an emperor. Strangers from

## Goethe

remote parts, such as the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland, came to claim the honour of pressing his hand. And this illustrious genius appreciated Marianne as none had ever done before. It is no wonder that she responded and let her heart flow toward him. She sang his most impassioned songs and ballads, as he had never heard them before, and induced him to read his poems. When he listened to her singing his "God and the Bayadere"—the ballad in which the "beautiful lost child" enchains the heart of a god—he reflected with deep emotion on the life that might have been hers.

After three weeks of this "beautiful dream," as Marianne afterwards called it, in the riverside house, Goethe went to stay at Willemer's house in Frankfort. From there he sent to Marianne the first poem of the series which were later to form the richest section of his *West-Eastern Divan*. They had written verses to each other even in the previous year, but in her present state of exaltation Marianne discovered a poetical faculty of a very high order and wrote verse comparable to that of Goethe himself. She made a happy reply to his sonnet, and they began to exchange sentiments which they could not have ventured to express in prose. In a few days Goethe was back at Gerbermühle. It was a beautiful summer, and the days passed in a state of happiness that Goethe had not expected ever to know again. The impassioned sonnets continued, and one may fancy that Willemer and Boisserée began to be concerned. They sat until late in the night on September 17th, in the light of a glorious



*Photo by]*

*[L Held, Weimar*

MARIANNE VON WILLEMER



## The Last Fires of Love

moon, while Goethe, in his deep, thrilling, melodious voice, read some of his finest work to them. Marianne seems to have consulted her heart that night and felt that the delicate feeling was becoming an uncontrollable passion. On the following day she tenderly asked Goethe to go, and he accompanied Boisserée to Heidelberg, to make a fresh study of his pictures.

The romance, however, was not yet ended. For a few days they corresponded and exchanged sentiments by referring each other to verses in Hammer's translation of the Persian poet Hafiz's amorous poem *Divan*. On the 23rd Herr von Willemer and Marianne came to Heidelberg and the golden days were restored. On the 26th the Willemers returned to their home, and Goethe never saw Marianne again. It was not possible to maintain their feeling at such a pitch; it must either grow or die. Marianne compressed her feeling in the beautiful sonnet on the west wind, which must "hasten to my love and speak softly to his heart," and Goethe replied. He then went to Karlsruhe, in restless, irritable mood, and tried in vain to find interest in the conversation of his old friend Jung (Stelling). He had arranged to meet Karl August afterwards at Frankfort, but he concluded, apparently, that he must disturb the young wife no more. He was not well, he said, very implausibly, to Boisserée, and he did not care to meet Caroline Jagemann, the Duke's mistress, whom he detested and by whom he was detested. He returned to Weimar. We may measure the depth of his passion and the firmness of his re-

## Goethe

nunciation by the circumstance that he refused ever again to return to the west, where he had spent the happiest months of his later life. Zelter pressed him in the following year to go to Wiesbaden, but he refused. He would go to Baden-Baden with Meyer; and when the carriage met with an accident soon after starting, he nervously regarded it as an omen, and returned home. He maintained, however, a very friendly correspondence with Marianne until his death.

"It is the nature of genius," Goethe once said, as if in allusion to this love of his sixty-seventh year, "to enjoy a second puberty, while other folk are young only once." We saw that there were special influences preparing him for the passionate life at Gerbermühle, and we must now add one which explains the form of the poem *The West-Eastern Divan* that embodied his verses and those of Marianne. One of the many growing interests of this time was a serious appreciation of the East. It is somewhat fantastic to say that the Napoleonic wars had brought the East into the mind of the West. For a hundred years travellers had been bringing into Europe wonderful tales both of the near and the far East. Voltaire often gave an Oriental form to his satires. Goethe had written *God and the Bayadere* (i. e. the Hindoo love-child) in 1797, and some have sought the source of his *Elective Affinities* in the *Thousand and One Nights*. German scholars had been for some years occupied with the East, and Goethe had been particularly attracted by Hammer's translation of the *Divan* of

## The Last Fires of Love

the Persian poet Hafiz. He had previously read Jones's *Asiatic Poetry*.

It will be quite understood how the feeling or philosophy of the Persian poets—which we now know so well from Fitzgerald's *Omar*—appealed to Goethe. However much the Eastern art fell short of the classical ideal, the sentiment of the Eastern poets agreed with that of the lighter classical poets and was more warmly expressed. Goethe resolved to indicate this in a "West-Eastern" adaptation or imitation of Hafiz. He began the writing in the summer of 1814, and was in this mood of the Oriental sensuous philosophy when he went westward and met Marianne. He at once conceived himself as the Hatem of the Persian poem, and Marianne as the poet's Suleika. When he discovered that Suleika herself was a poet, he was further inspired, and found rich material for the "Suleika Book" of the poem. When he returned to Weimar he rapidly composed the remainder of the *Divan*. Marianne's poems have the rare distinction of lying side by side with his own (in the "Suleika Book") and not suffering from the comparison. Of the poem as a whole it may be said that its claim to unite East and West could not be sustained. The most distinguishing characters of the Persian soul are omitted, and little more is taken from the East than the exaltation of love. Of that Goethe was fully conscious. It was enough for him to show his agreement in this one point, in defiance of what he regarded as the asceticism or the hypocrisy of European creeds.

## Goethe

While he worked at the completion of his poem, the Council of Vienna was erasing the last traces of revolutionary and Napoleonic disturbance from the map of Europe. Goethe, who remained indifferent to political changes as such, and rejoiced only at the opportunity for a tranquil development of culture, found his position improved by this settlement. In proportion as Weimar had been disliked by Napoleon, it was rewarded by his conquerors. It was elevated to the rank of a Grand Duchy, and its area was doubled. The old Privy Council disappeared, as a new constitution was framed, and Goethe became Prime Minister, with a salary of 3000 thalers a year and an understanding that he might confine his interest to the institutions of science and art. He had no inclination to interfere in the new politics. As in the rest of Europe, the new constitution was democratic. The pressure which had betrayed itself in so formidable an explosion was to be eased by free speech and popular representation. Goethe had no sympathy with the latter and a very restricted regard for the former. He held rigidly to the aristocratic or Aristotelean ideal of government by the most competent, and thought that the rulers only were capable of choosing the most competent. One must remember the terrible illiteracy of the people even in the early decades of the nineteenth century. In that very year it was found that 120,000 children in London (then one-sixth its present size) received no education whatever. But we may defer for a moment the question of Goethe's attitude toward

## The Last Fires of Love

the new political world and the aspirations of democracy.

On June 6th, 1816, Christiane died. Her health had been poor for some years, and there is no doubt that she gravely injured herself by excessive indulgence in drink in the critical years of her womanhood. She had just passed her fifty-first birthday at the time of her death. Her aunt and sister had died, her companion Caroline Ulrich had married Riemer and gone away, and her husband was away from her for the greater part of the year. Always sensual, and fond of wine and dancing, she had been imprudent at a time for control, and her increasing illness ended in epilepsy. Goethe had gone to Jena in May, and was recalled on the 30th by a message that she was seriously ill. She lay in terrible pain for a week, biting her tongue in her sufferings. Neither Goethe nor August could stay by her bed. Almost alone, in great agony, she ended her life about midday on the 6th of June. The one woman of the better society of Jena who had been kind to her, Johanna Schopenhauer, wrote to a friend that her "immoderate tastes" had had a "fearful revenge."

"Emptiness and the stillness of death within and without me," Goethe wrote in his diary. The physician tells that, when Christiane lay in her agony, Goethe sank on his knees, weeping, and exclaimed: "Thou shalt not, thou canst not, leave me"; and some days afterwards he expressed in verse his deep distress at her loss. For his grief we respect him, but it would be foolish to take these

## Goethe

few poignant expressions in the days of her agony and death as a sober indication of what Christiane had been to Goethe. I have endeavoured in earlier chapters to form some consistent judgment out of the contradictory evidence. For some years she had much sensuous charm for him, she was a good housewife, she undertook much of the less important business of controlling the theatrical troupe, she gave her husband a handsome boy (whose vices were not yet apparent), and her many painful experiences with later births ensured his sympathy. But the fondness for her which he always more or less entertained was checked by her complete lack of culture and overcast by the jealous concern which her injudicious gaiety caused him; and when circumstances compelled him to convert his concubine into a wife, the effort to extort a recognition of her wearied him. In short, his union with Christiane was the greatest blunder and the most lamentable experience of his career; it is redeemed only by the generosity with which he clung to her.

Goethe's loneliness was soon afterwards relieved by the betrothal of his son to Ottilie von Pogwisch. In spite of his occasional expressions of satisfaction Goethe must have been disappointed in August. Modern theories of heredity meet a very determined check in the lives of great men. Though their ancestors and descendants are judged by the most lenient, if not generous, standards, and the subsidiary theory is advanced that any great departure from the human mean tends to return in the next generation, the biographies of men of great dis-

## The Last Fires of Love

inction yield little encouragement. The genius springs at a bound from the mean, and, although he has smoothed the path and lent the glamour of a great name to his descendants, they generally sink at once, not gradually, to mediocrity. August von Goethe was no exception. Inheriting all his father's grace and handsomeness of person, he received no share whatever of his genius; he was of mediocre prosy intelligence and weak character. We must further admit that, however much we may admire Goethe's pedagogical ideas, his training of August was unfortunate. A severe and systematic education might have done much for a youth who was not sufficiently master of himself, and this he did not receive. His home-training was too frequently suspended by voyages, and his higher education consisted of incomplete courses at various schools. He settled at Weimar in an unpaid appointment in the administration, and, at the re-arrangement of offices in 1815, he was appointed officially as assistant to his father. He had excellent business faculties, and was of great use in keeping Goethe's papers and affairs in order.

Toward the end of 1816 he was affianced to Ottilie, granddaughter of the Baroness von Henckel-Donnersmarck, daughter of one of the ladies of the Court. They were married in June, and lived in Goethe's house. There is little doubt that Ottilie was won by the father rather than the son. August was regarded chiefly in Weimar as the son of Christiane, and it was said that he had inherited her, and her father's, weakness. At first, however, the young

## Goethe

pair were happy and Goethe rejoiced in the brightening of his house. Whenever he travelled he thought of gifts for Ottilie, and he would send to distant places for luxuries to assist her housekeeping. He was very fond of the fine, nervous, devoted girl, and treated her as a daughter. Even in this second generation, however, he was destined to suffer for his error and witness a cruel extinction of his hopes. August was oppressed by his father's greatness and his own conscious mediocrity, and Ottilie was not the woman to accommodate herself to his morbid moods; he was sensuous in disposition, and Ottilie had neither beauty nor sensuous feeling to meet his demands. After the birth of their first child, Walther, in 1818, the conjugal life gradually passed from indifference to hostility.

In the year of the marriage, 1817, Goethe had a very painful experience. He still controlled the Weimar theatre, and August was now associated with him in the direction. Most of the actors were very devoted to Goethe, in spite of his despotism, but the leading actress, Caroline Jagemann, a beautiful and resolute, full-bodied woman, chafed under his control and conducted an intrigue against him for some years. She was the openly recognised mistress of the Duke, and petulantly pressed for the dismissal of Goethe. In 1817 she at last found an opportunity. She urged the Duke to invite to Weimar an actor named Karsten, who introduced into his piece a performing dog. Karl August, who liked dogs and did not share Goethe's severe theatrical standard, consented. Goethe angrily



## The Last Fires of Love

protested, but Karsten and his dog came to Jena, and a performance was promised for April 12th. Goethe, apparently, had no communication with Karl August throughout the quarrel; he impetuously told others that he would abandon the theatre, and went off to Jena. The actress now so far prevailed upon the Duke that he posted in the theatre a cruel notice that Goethe was relieved of his functions, as the Duke heard that he wished to resign. A similarly hard and impersonal notice was sent to Goethe at Jena. Although Karl August at once regretted his action, and went to embrace and conciliate Goethe at Jena, the wound was deep. From that time Goethe took little interest in the theatre.

Other stories are told of the petulance of Goethe, as he grew older, and the reluctance of others, sometimes, to bow to his despotic resolution. He mentions in his diary that in 1818 he enlarged the library at Jena, and "certain hindrances were vigorously swept aside." A large room adjoining the library offered the additional space which he needed, but it belonged to the medical faculty, and they refused to give it to him. He secretly obtained power from the Duke—who, except on the one painful occasion, laughingly told him to do as he pleased—power to appropriate it, and demanded the key. When he was told that it could "not be found," he had the wall between the two rooms broken through, and ordered his assistants to fill the room with books before the medical men came. His autocracy led him into many such collisions. When the aggrieved

## Goethe

parties appealed to the Duke, he said genially: "I never interfere in Goethe's affairs."

Toward the larger world of his time Goethe seemed to betray the same petulance and arrogance of age, though it is easy for us to understand his deliberate policy. I have previously indicated that he regarded with concern two tendencies of the age: Romanticism in culture and Democracy in politics. The years between his love of Marianne and his last love-story were much occupied with these tendencies. He had in 1816 founded a new art-journal, *Kunst und Alterthum* (*Art and Antiquity*), and had at first reflected in it his temporary leniency towards the Romanticists. He was in sympathy with their general aim of spreading the love of fine art, and broadly in agreement with the idea of appreciating early German art and letters and the careful study of religious feeling. But the exaggerations of the Romanticists compelled him to speak with bitterness and hostility. A drastic attack on them by Meyer appeared in *Kunst und Alterthum* in 1817, and Goethe, in a letter to Meyer, speaks of it as "*our* bomb." His attitude put him out of sympathy with so many friends in the west that, quite apart from the memory of Marianne, we cannot wonder at his avoidance from that time of the pleasant Rhineland.

The political movement was equally serious. While Romanticism threatened to pervert culture, and prevent a wholesome return to Greek and Roman standards, the democratic movement seemed to him to menace its very existence. When Gabriele

## The Last Fires of Love

d'Annunzio describes the advancing democratic movement of our time as "a grey flood of democratic mud," he is fairly expressing Goethe's feeling in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Germany, if not Europe, was in the throes of the birth of Liberalism, and European monarchs generally adopted toward it the attitude of Herod. Goethe, as at the time of the French Revolution, stood sombrely aside from both parties. The political enthusiasm of university professors and students seemed to him a perversion of their energy; the claim that the masses should control government seemed to him a case of the ox demanding the saddle. It is curious that just in those years the manuscript of his fragmentary *Prometheus*—a fragment quite in the spirit of Shelley—was discovered amongst his papers. He refused to allow it to be published. Young men and unlettered workers should leave politics to the more experienced. He readily acquiesced in the suppression of newspapers which infringed this principle.

In this way Goethe seemed again to misunderstand and oppose one of the finest and most irrepressible aspirations of his age. Yet, when we describe him as conservative, we must separate him widely from the conservatism of a Metternich or a Louis XVIII or the papal court. He desired the spread of enlightenment as eagerly as they dreaded it. He has himself sharply distinguished his position from that of conservatives of the Holy Alliance, who desired power not that they might elevate and enrich their people. "They call to their aid stupid-

## Goethe

ity and darkness," he said: "I intelligence and light." The barbarities they perpetrated in defence of their power were abhorrent to him, and the whole violent collision of passions, good and bad, again disturbed the even flow of culture. The detested Kotzbue had come to live opposite Goethe's house, and was known to be a Russian spy; and in 1819 Kotzbue was assassinated by a Jena student. The aged poet regarded the future with grave concern. We shall see, however, when we come to examine *Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre* that he was by no means wholly deaf to the demands of the new age.

These incidents and expressions indicate that Goethe is passing into old age, but there was yet to be a last strange flicker of younger sentiment. There are stars whose light wanes and then bursts out in renewed glory in the heavens, and some astronomers believe that they are dying suns, in which the dark heavy vapours are forming a shroud round the giant body, to be rent and shattered at times by the last great flame of its energy. So there were times when, even in old age, Goethe's great power of love rose with final defiance against the invading cold. The last passion was that lit by Marianne, von Willemer: the last flicker occurred in his seventy-fourth year.

For his summer rest in the year 1821 he went to Marienbad, and met, in the company there, a certain Frau von Levetzow, wife of the Mecklenburg Court-marshal. He had met and admired her some years before. Her father had a house at Marienbad, and in the following year (1822) Goethe was invited to

## The Last Fires of Love

stay with them. There were three daughters, of whom the eldest, Ulrike, was then eighteen years old. If there is a "significant age," to borrow the phrase of Lewes, in Goethe's loves it is eighteen, not sixteen; and the gentle and beautiful Ulrike, with calm blue eyes, slender graceful figure, and cheerful and ingenuous nature, found a place in the heart of the aged poet. He took walks with her, and listened with pleasure to her reading of Scott's novels. His letters to her in the following months sufficiently indicate his feeling. She is his "daughter" and he her "loving papa."

In the summer of 1823 he was again with the Levetzows at Marienbad, and now he began to regard the fair Ulrike with other eyes than those of a loving papa. Though it may seem to lessen the interest of a romantic idyll of old age, it is necessary to observe that Goethe was much shaken in health that summer. He had had an inflammation of the pericardium in February, and it was greatly feared that he would die. He recovered, to the warm applause of Europe, but one may assume that he went to Marienbad in a nervous and unbalanced condition. It is also not irrelevant to observe that the domestic harmony of his home was already broken. August was moody and quarrelsome: Ottilie impatient and unaccommodating.

Goethe reached Marienbad at the beginning of July, and the Levetzows came about a week later. There was high and brilliant company—the Duke of Leuchtenberg, Louis Napoleon, Karl August, etc.—and Goethe was much honoured and stimulated.

## Goethe

Whether or no Goethe had decided before he came, he was soon anxious to wed Ulrike. This tardy sentiment must have been awkward, if not painful, to them all. Goethe approached his seventy-fourth birthday. He had not indeed the parched and shrunken appearance which most men would have at that age. His frame was round and vigorous and upright, his eye clear and luminous, and only a few white hairs could be seen amongst the dark brown. But Ulrike von Levetzow was not yet twenty years old, and was either too sensuous or too sensible to wed a man who had passed the three score years and ten, however eminent he might be. Goethe himself appreciated the peculiarity of his position, and could not bring himself to propose to the maiden. He asked Karl August to speak to her mother, and the mother approached her daughter.

Ulrike said afterwards that she had been willing to marry Goethe if her mother desired it. Fortunately for her, the mother was not eager for the marriage, and she gave Goethe an evasive reply. He continued to pay attention to Ulrike, and, when he heard that the Levetzows were leaving again, he became extremely agitated and followed them to Karlsbad. He again spent the day by the side of Ulrike, and sat with the family at night, or watched Ulrike dance "like some seraph amid a chorus of grim clouds." If we may trust the poem which he afterwards wrote, they lived in some intimacy and kisses were exchanged. Yet at the end of August he had once more to part without a decisive answer to his suit, and he felt himself attuned to the strain



ULRIKE VON LEVETZOW

(Publications of Goethesellschaft, Volume 15 )

## The Last Fires of Love

of ~~an~~ elegy. He began the poem ("Elegy"—the second in his *Trilogy of Passion*) in which he has buried his last love and last hope. It is a singularly impassioned and beautiful piece for a man in the eighth decade of life, however surely we may trace in it the symptoms of disease.

During the winter that followed his unanswered and unreasonable passion continued to disturb his life. He had written to prepare August for his marriage. "We need a fourth party to complete the set," he had said; and he spoke to them of his hope when he returned home. Ottilie, who was unwell, maintained an ominous silence; how could she possibly welcome a new mistress in the house, halving the heritage and the honouring care of Goethe? August was unreservedly hostile, almost brutal. He hinted at senility. Financially, as I said, he depended entirely on his father; he could not even set up a house of his own, if he had wished, and the future of his two sons concerned him. He did not conceal his temper, and Goethe was so unhappy that he fell ill once more.

"And when man's dumb amid his suffering,  
Grant me some god that I may chant my pain,"

is the motto of his "Elegy." He, the great lover, must leave the earth for ever without knowing its completest joy. During all his life he had either loved women whom he could not possess, or pos-  
sessed one whom he did not deeply love and esteem. At the eleventh hour fate seemed to offer him compensation, and he yearned for it. He overrode the



## Goethe

opposition of his son, and hoped again. His ~~letters~~ to Frau von Levetzow in the winter show that he had not abandoned his suit. The Levetzows either wavered or were painfully wanting in courage. In the following summer, indeed, they invited him to join them at Dresden. Goethe did not go. He had by that time recognised that his proposal was not welcomed. He continued a friendly correspondence with the Levetzows until his death, but never saw them again. Ulrike never married. She lived—nothing could more strongly impress us with the hopelessness of Goethe's last love—until the year 1899. Goethe remembered the Seven Years' War: Ulrike was to see the outbreak of the Boer War.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE LAST DECADE

GOETHE'S life, so exceptionally full in experience and achievement, was to be full also in length of days. Nine years were allotted to him after the failure of his last love. They were years of tranquil and monotonous life and rich recognition. His home became a shrine to which pilgrims went with reverence from all parts of Europe; and the pilgrims were not unlettered devotees, but the noblest and wisest of many lands. He lived long enough to complete in perfect ease the two great works of his old age, and deliver his mature gospel to the world. Well might he write that Pandora's box was full, not of evils, but of blessings. The only evil was the inevitable shadow cast upon the close of a long life. Ever and anon the mournful toll of the passing bell broke upon his ears, and he had to go forth and lay in the ground the men and women who had shared his pleasures and his pains.

The glow of youthful freshness which had illumined the last decade rapidly sank, and Goethe settled down to the ways of an old man. He clung to Weimar, journeying now neither to east nor west when the laughter of the holidays rang out; and in Weimar he clung to his home, going little to Court and less to other houses. Two handsome grand-

## Goethe

children, Walther and Wolfgang, brightened his hours, and a baby girl, Alma, was added to them in 1827. His unfading fondness for children and his great interest in education made these children welcome in his home. Their mother paid him the attention of a daughter, and he was happy when she fondled and kissed him. Over this domestic happiness, however, a shade was slowly deepening. There were frequent quarrels between August and Ottilie, and both were in some measure to blame. Ottilie despised the son as much as she respected the father, and her impulsive and somewhat shallow character was not fitted to meet a difficult situation. She spoke of August as "her bear," and he gradually turned from her cheerless company to dissipation.

Goethe's activity in these later years is necessarily even and uneventful, but it is known to us with particular fulness. It was in the year 1823 that Eckermann—his Boswell—entered his service and began diligently to record his conversations with the master. Almost a self-educated man, but young, enthusiastic, and a model reporter, he won Goethe's regard, and was engaged to help in the new edition of his works. Of his full and active life in that last decade, however, only three classes of events interest the biographer: the homage paid to him, the departure of his old friends, the completion of his greater works.

Goethe had met and outlived much criticism during his life. He had made the mistake of satirising many writers who conferred distinction on

## The Last Decade

themselves, and then permitting himself to write at times when the inspiration or the leisure failed. To the censorious the immense collection of his works offered many a vulnerable piece. Of late years his political attitude also had strengthened the critics. It was easy after the fall of Napoleon to discover that Goethe's aloofness from the national aspiration was wrong and prejudicial; and the increasing power of the democratic movement in Europe put in an equally unfavourable light his aristocratic ideal. On the scientific side he unfortunately insisted still on his erroneous theory of colour, while the sound work of his earlier years was unknown or was attributed to other men. But it was chiefly in regard to religion and morals that the opposition to him felt itself on strong ground: especially in regard to religion. He had in effect made peace with the moralists. The artist not uncommonly devotes his early energy to securing greater moral freedom, and his later and riper power to rebuking the young generation which would follow his early lead. Shakespeare employed his mature art in the exaltation of fine character: Swinburne's last great poem, almost, was the dedication of "the altar of righteousness." So Goethe, as we shall see presently, became in his age the preacher of renunciation, and earnestly counselled men not to imitate the example he had given; though there is no clear and unmistakable evidence that he ever wholly disavowed his claim of greater freedom in sex relations.

In regard to religion he remained to the end

## Goethe

outside all the recognised bodies. At times he used language—for instance, in declaring that he was “a true Protestant”—which lends itself to misquotation, and more advanced heretics were scornful about his accommodating attitude. What Goethe always meant, however, in such phrases was that he shared the religion of Christ as he found it in the New Testament, not as he found it embodied in a series of abstract propositions in the creeds. Like Voltaire and Rousseau, he sincerely believed in God as the supreme power of the world, but held that His nature was inscrutable to men, since men see only His manifestations. In plainer language, he held that God and Nature were identical, but men saw the nature-aspect only. His belief, in fact, was mainly instinctive or intuitive; that is to say, it did not rest on *extensive* and *explicit* reasoning, and he offered no arguments for it. Of the same order, though much feebler, was his belief in the immortality of the soul. “The sensible man leaves the future world out of consideration, and is content to be active and useful in this,” he said in his later years. Of the religions of the world he held that Christianity was the best, but he did not admit the claim of a positive revelation. In almost the last year of his life he heard that some one was trying to found a sect called the Hypsistarii, or communion of those who chose the best out of all religions. He wrote (March 20th, 1831) to his friend Sulpiz Boisserée that that was the sect to which he belonged. It is his final and most true indication of his religion.

## The Last Decade

This genial heterodoxy placed a weapon in the hands of his opponents, and they used it vigorously, as the grandchildren of some of them do to-day. But this discord was lost in the mighty chorus of appreciation which gladdened his later years. The stream of visitors and gifts from many lands increased rather than diminished. Books had travelled slowly in the eighteenth century, and much even of his earlier work was only just penetrating into other lands; and indeed he was still active enough to feed the fires of his admirers. The sphere of his influence now extended from Edinburgh to Rome. His visitors in one year included the King of Bavaria, the Prussian princes, the poets Holzer and Streckfuss, the orientalist Stickel, the philosopher Hegel, the Russian poet Schukowsky, the French scientist Ampère, the Swiss statesman Stapfer, and many others. They represent the vast range of interests which pleasantly occupied Goethe in his later years. It could not be said of him, even in extreme age :

“ Isled from the fretful hour, he stands alone  
And hears the eternal movement, and beholds  
The flowing, flowing, flowing of the world.”

Never had life interested him more than when he calmly surveyed it from the mountain slope. Europe was awake again, after the slumber that had followed the restoration. Science, letters, education, politics, theology, economics—the streams were surging and flashing as they had never done before in recent history.

## Goethe

He watched France and England, after Germany, with especial interest. He read the French literary journals regularly, and followed the work of Hugo, Béranger, Ste. Beuve, Balzac, Guizot, Villemain, Cousin and others. Of British writers those who chiefly interested him were Scott, Carlyle and Burns—three Scotchmen. He was very well acquainted with earlier English letters, and had in previous years appreciated Swift and Sterne. For Byron he had had the greatest regard; Byron was, he said, the only poet in Europe to approach himself. That was, of course, after Schiller's death. He first discovered Byron when he read *Manfred* in 1817. They corresponded, and he translated fragments of Byron into German and predicted a great future for him. His premature death in 1824 greatly distressed Goethe. Apparently Goethe's appreciation of English character was not unflattering. In an earlier chapter I noted that he described his loyal and devoted Swiss friend Meyer as having "an English goodness of heart." One other instance is recorded. When, in 1831, the Carlyles and a dozen other English admirers (including Scott, Wordsworth and Southey) sent him a gold seal-ring, inscribed with the line "Ohne Hast, ohne Rast" (Without haste and without rest), he observed that the words truly described the English character; and those words contained the last ideal of his life.

Italy also he watched with sympathy, early recognising the art of Manzoni. He was still, we must remember, engaged on some of his own most

## The Last Decade

important works; *Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre* was not finished until 1829, *Faust* not until 1831. But his chief and most congenial task was the survey of the world. In the affairs of Weimar he still took the closest interest, and little of importance was done in the duchy that had not been discussed with him. After that came the daily or weekly review of the literature of Europe. The series of articles he wrote in his last years indicate the breadth of his view and the sustained clearness of his mind. The growing cosmopolitanism of art and science was to him one of the most promising signs of the time. Religions and patriotisms and politics divided men; he wished to raise high above all their grisly frontiers the common human ideals of the good, the true and the beautiful—in other words, to unite the best men of all lands in a common zeal for the exaltation of letters, science and art. From them the enlightenment would gradually spread into the mass of the people. This seemed to him more important than the demand for a share in the government which was characteristic of his age. It is a well-known story how, when the news of the July Revolution reached Weimar, and Soret entered his room, he burst out excitedly: "The volcano has erupted: everything is in flames." Soret began to speak of the causes of the Revolution, but Goethe interrupted him. He was referring to the dispute between Cuvier and St. Hilaire in the Academy of Sciences at Paris, the full report of which he had just received.

From the general indications of his interests and



## Goethe

activity during his last years we pass to a summary review of events. The year 1825 was the half-centenary of Karl August's accession to power and of Goethe's coming to Weimar. Both dates were splendidly celebrated. On September 3rd Goethe joined with the others in congratulating the Grand Duke; on November 7th his turn came, and Weimar drew on all its resources to honour him. When he opened the shutters of his window in the early morning, he was surprised to hear a chorus greeting him from the garden. At nine, when he entered his reception rooms, he found them packed with courtiers, scholars and town officials. A specially composed ode was sung as he came in, and a gold medal, bearing the heads of Luise and Karl August on one side and the laurel-crowned head of Goethe on the other, was presented to him. Then deputations approached him, representing the Jena University, the Freemasons, the Town Council and the Councils of smaller towns. Weimar conferred its citizenship on his son and grandsons. At ten the Grand Duke and Duchess came, and all three were deeply moved at the recollection of the half-century they had passed together. The eldest son, Karl Friedrich, and his wife, Maria, both devoted to Goethe, followed the parents with the other members of the grand ducal family. After them came all the ministers, judges, officers—every man and woman of position or distinction. They were taken two by two into the room where Goethe sat to receive them. At two there was a public banquet in the Town Hall, with music and speeches. Goethe

## The Last Decade

was not present—his physician carefully watched him—but August made a fitting speech for him. Later there was a performance of *Iphigenia* in the theatre, a serenade in front of his house, an illumination of the town, and a final gathering of friends in Goethe's house. It was a simple festivity, its poems of no high order; but Goethe must have reflected with pride that Weimar could do no more. Probably when he retired to his room he would recall the strange struggle with Demoiselle Delf in his bedroom at Heidelberg fifty years before and his quotation of *Egmont*.

His birthday was an annual festivity, when letters and presents reached him from all parts of Germany and Europe. At his seventy-eighth birthday King Louis of Bavaria came to greet him and give him the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit. Karl August stood by, and Goethe turned to ask his permission to accept the foreign distinction. "You old duffer! Don't be silly," said the Grand Duke. They were "brothers," as Karl August sometimes said, to the end; and the end was nearer than they knew. It was the end of a generation, the age of farewells. Frau von Stein had died in January 1827; twenty years of sincere friendship with Goethe had obliterated the memory of earlier days. Lotte von Schiller had died the year before. On June 14th, 1828, Karl August died on his way home from Berlin. Goethe was so distressed that for ten days he was unable to write a letter of condolence to Luise. He found it impossible to attend the funeral, and went to rest for some weeks at the castle of Dornburg.

## Goethe

Its fine prospect over a genial sunny country refreshed him, and he recovered from the blow and wrote a last pathetic love-song. As he sat in the moonlight on August 25th he recalled the evening, thirteen years before, when he and Marianne von Willemer had vowed to think of each other whenever the full moon lit the earth. He wrote and sent to Marianne the poem, "Wilt thou so soon leave me?"

He returned to Weimar to finish *Meister* and continue *Faust*. A very pleasant surprise awaited him in his home; the Duke of Mecklenburg-Strelitz had bought and sent to him the "grandfather's clock" which his mother had sold with other furniture when she moved from the house in the Hirschgraben. For two further years he worked and watched, and then the toll of the bell fell once more, with more terrible message, on his ear. On February 14th, 1830, the Grand Duchess Luise died. Ever since he had settled to sober work in Weimar she had been united to him in warm friendship, and he sincerely mourned her. The new Grand Duke, who was almost a pupil of Goethe, maintained the tradition of love and honour for him; his wife Maria (formerly Maria Paulowna, a Russian princess) was devoted to Goethe, and her fine character and zeal for culture brought her into some intimacy with him. Meyer also—and alone—was still with him, and would just survive him. But the toll of the bell broke out again; his only child had died.

I have already indicated how August von Goethe

## The Last Decade

gave concern to his father. His married life had become more and more unhappy, and he had taken to drink and dissipation. In the early part of 1830 Goethe decided to send him to Italy, and trusted that the large experience and long absence from Ottilie would reform him. He sent with him Eckermann, his still young but very sober and intellectual assistant, and they set out on April 22nd. Unhappily August began again to drink heavily when he reached Italy, and Eckermann, who had not the least influence on him, left him at Genoa in July. On the day that Eckermann left, August broke his clavicle, and Goethe became very uneasy. August recovered and went on to Naples, and from there to Rome. At Rome he contracted fever and died on October 27th. A post-mortem examination showed that his liver and brain had for some time been affected. I may add here that August's daughter died in her seventeenth year; Wolfgang lived until 1883 and Walther until 1885. Both sons were unmarried, both morose and mediocre in character and intellect.

His second and greater grief in 1830 almost overpowered Goethe. Chancellor Müller broke the news to him, and supported him for several days. His attitude puzzled many, and has suggested to critics that he was heartless. He would allow no one to mention August, and spoke of the death himself only to a few intimate friends. To Ottilie it would have been a relief to speak with him about August, but he would not allow it. Even when a young artist who had been with August in Rome

## Goethe

when he died came to Weimar, Goethe spoke feverishly to him of art, and did not ask a question about his son. But sixteen days after hearing of the death of his son he was stricken with a violent hemorrhage which almost proved fatal. The son had succumbed to a less evil in his thirty-ninth year on account of the ruin of his constitution; the father, in his seventy-ninth year, survived a more terrible affliction and recovered. He was able to tell Zelter in December that, so excellent was the condition of his "works," the hands had been merely delayed for a few minutes and were again moving normally over the dial. He was to finish *Wilhelm Meister, Poetry and Truth*, and *Faust*, and thus completely round his artistic life before the night fell.

Of *Poetry and Truth* nothing further need be said here, but the other two works contain his last and most solemn message to his fellows, and must be briefly considered in this respect. *Wilhelm Meister's Travel-years* is a psychological, but not an artistic, continuation of the *Lehrjahre*. Schiller had pressed him to write a sequel to the earlier novel, in which one might read the philosophy of life to which Wilhelm eventually attained. In spite of the long apprenticeship Wilhelm seemed to have learned no craft whatever in the earlier story. Goethe began to write it in 1807. It is clear that from the first he despaired of composing a long and consistent narrative, and intended to rely largely on the use of tales and papers which he had already either composed or written. Then came the interlude with Minna Herzlieb, and one of these tales

360

## The Last Decade

grew into the *Elective Affinities*. After an interval of ten years he took it up again, and finished the first part. Five years again elapsed before he touched it, and it was only in the autumn of 1828 and beginning of 1829 that he found the energy to finish it. A final error accentuated its fragmentary and unsatisfactory character. He thought that it would expand to three volumes; when the printer found that it was not long enough for this, he handed to Eckermann a bundle of unpublished papers and directed him to insert them somehow and somewhere in the story.

It follows at once that the second part of Wilhelm Meister's adventures is æsthetically far inferior to the first. Not only was Goethe's artistic power failing, but his intellect was outliving it, and he came to attach less importance to the form than to the substance of his observations on life. It is marred also for most readers by the excessive symbolism or mysticism which he cultivated in his later work, and the interpolation of quite irrelevant material for which he had no other use. The book is, in fact, a series of prosy essays threaded on a thin line of narrative, with artistic gems at intervals. Its chief interest, besides some of the short stories which it includes, is in the serious idea on human problems which Goethe embodies in it.

The chief ideals he offers to the world, as the outcome of his seventy years of conscious experience, are work, self-control and altruism. The moral is trite enough, but it seems to have been overlooked by writers who, like Oscar Levy (*The*

## Goethe

*Revival of Aristocracy*), claim Goethe as an apostle of the gospel of egoism. The supreme lesson of *Wilhelm Meister* and *Faust* is altruism. This useful activity is seen first in the training of children. The pedagogical element is very prominent in the book, and its principles generally follow the views of Pestalozzi. But the most surprising feature is to find Goethe venturing upon the sea of social idealism and adding another Utopia to those of Plato, More and Campanella. How far we may recognise a serious vein in this part of his work it is very difficult to say; but, since no writer ever yet framed such a Utopia without embodying in it his own ideals of social life, one is strongly disposed to see in it more than an idle flight of the poet's fancy. The leading characters of the story are united in an association for the furtherance of human progress, and their work culminates in the foundation of "colonies" or model communities of workers. It is curious to reflect that at the time when Goethe wrote this, Robert Owen was urging in England the foundation of somewhat similar "home colonies," as he called them. It is hardly likely that his theories reached Weimar, however; probably the French communists were more or less taken as a model.

No one will suggest, of course, that Goethe had any idea of advocating the formation of such voluntary communities or co-operative societies, though he had in common with those who did advocate it a distrust of political action. Nevertheless the principles which he describes as embodied in

## The Last Decade

the life of these ideal communities are of great social as well as biographical interest. A few outstanding features may be mentioned. The colonies are, in the literal sense of the word, communities of workers; artists are as essential as manual workers, but every man shall have a task and discharge it industriously. The holding of property is described as a curious blend of personal and communal ownership, the communal feature being very pronounced. The "heads" of the community must not reside in a fixed seat [like Weimar, let us say], but be ever on the move among the people; in fact, one of the most curious features is the constant moving of all from place to place. Hadrian, the great traveller, is presented as a model ruler. There is to be no metropolis, and large towns are not to be desired; the artists and players are to be ever on the move. National frontiers of the old kind will lose their significance; "where I am of use is my fatherland." Judges and lawyers do not exist; the "police directors" have a very large discretion in adjusting quarrels, and for graver matters a kind of jury must be convened. The laws are light, and punishment consists only in the segregation of the offender until he is better disposed. The established religion is a simple and practical form of Christianity; morality is summed up in the two commandments, "Moderation in voluntary things, industry in what is necessary."

These points will suffice to give an idea of Goethe's Utopia, which is almost entirely ignored by his biographers. It seems to me to have some



## Goethe

biographical significance. Apart from the fact that later Utopian writers (Morris, Lytton, Bellamy, etc.) as well as earlier have invariably had a serious aim, we recognise many of Goethe's ideas in his sociological fiction. Even if we regard merely these very general ideas, and do not take every imaginative feature as an approved reform, we discover that Goethe's conservatism assumes a strange character in his later years and is not far removed from democracy. He is making concessions to the spirit of the nineteenth century. There is, it is true, no explicit contradiction to his earlier creed. If he would not entrust government *to* the people, he had always insisted that it was to be *for* the people. This feeling seems to have grown upon him, and disposed him to coquet with some of the more advanced ideas of the age. We may recall that the Duke of Kent and even foreign princes were at that time sympathetic to Robert Owen's ideas, so that this mingling of aristocracy and social idealism was not at all unknown. The chief point of interest, however, is that Goethe is here seen to have taken a keen and sympathetic interest in reform and by no means to have isolated himself in the cultivation of art.

The general truth of this conclusion is sustained also by *Faust*. The story of the writing of that famous tragedy is well known, and may be told very briefly. We saw that the idea of it occurred to him when he was a student at Strassburg sixty years before. The old popular play of the aged scholar selling his soul to the devil for a few years of youth

## The Last Decade

was part of the repertoire of the puppet-theatres or marionette shows which were then common in Germany. We happen to have a positive indication that it was played in Leipsic during the time that Goethe was studying there. In the period of melancholy and brooding which fell upon him at Strassburg, before he met Friederike, it occurred to him that the old scholar's bitter disillusion reflected his own mood. He seemed—it was really only the conceit of a young man—to have tried all branches of learning and trodden all the promising paths of life without finding happiness. In that mood he conceived Faust's great monologue; possibly, according to his custom, actually composed in his mind many lines of it. He began to write after he had returned to Frankfort, and probably wrote the monologue, the dialogue with the earth-spirit, and the dialogue of Mephistopheles and the student in 1772. In the next two years he wrote the Gretchen scenes, which had been inspired by his relations with Friederike. Other scenes were added (the Auerbach tavern, for instance) in 1775, and again at Rome. During all these years, since 1774, the play accompanied him everywhere in the form of a bundle of disjointed papers. The manuscript (the *Urfaust*) to which I referred in an earlier chapter represents an early, if not the earliest, putting together of these scenes. It was re-written and published as a fragment of a tragedy in 1790.

The period of inspiration in the comradeship with Schiller disposed him to approach it again in 1797 and at various times in the next few years. He tells

## Goethe

Schiller in 1800 that he is at work on what we recognise as the Helena episode in the second part. 'After Schiller's death he felt unable to continue, and he published the first part alone in 1808. He then allowed seventeen years to pass without further thought of it, and resumed it in 1825. It is an ingenious and pleasant speculation that the death of Byron—the transition of the young poet from "a lust for life" to a "lust for deeds"—inspired the idea of the second part. Goethe describes the two parts in those phrases, and Byron is recognised in the second part. Goethe's own moral development, however, had already proceeded on that line, and it was inevitable that Faust should make that advance; the Greek episode, also, had been conceived and begun long before. No doubt the events of 1824 brought his thoughts back to the Helena fragment. He completed it and published it, as an interlude to his tragedy, in 1827. From that time he calls the completion of *Faust* his "chief business." It advanced a little each year, and was completed in 1831 in the month of July. He sealed the packet for posthumous publication, apparently feeling that it would meet much criticism which he would rather not read. He reopened the packet in January 1832 and altered the conclusion, afterwards again sealing the manuscript. We shall see that he died two months afterwards.

This abbreviated account of the writing of *Faust* at once marks it as, in a singular degree, the work of Goethe's life, the expression of his development, and the vehicle of his last message to the world.

## The Last Decade

Faust is Goethe, and Goethe is a type of mankind. It is an epic of the human pilgrimage, from the threshold of manhood to the grave. Unhappily the æsthetic value and intellectual character of the two parts are so unequal that few read the tragedy in its entirety, and to most people it is known only in theatrical or operatic perversions. For the stage it was, of course, never intended, and a condemnation of it by theatrical standards is foolish. The familiar opera is an affliction to the student of Goethe, and even the best dramatic adaptation gravely perverts the original. But Goethe is himself grievously to blame for the comparative failure of his chief creation. The first part of *Faust* is a clear and superb tragedy, on which it is unnecessary to enlarge. Taking the "Prologue in Heaven" as a partly humorous freak of his pagan spirit, and admitting that the addition of Oberon and Titania's wedding to the "Walpurgis Night" is an ill-advised and inartistic use of superfluous matter (a belated batch of "Xenien" which Schiller rejected), the first part remains one of Goethe's greatest creations.

It is, as Schiller urged, inconclusive in one sense. Apart from the melodramatic interest of the ultimate fate of Faust and his compact with the devil, a grave human problem has been stated and left unanswered. Man has set out in search of happiness—and not found it. Schiller pressed Goethe to make Faust find it, and so offer a philosophy of life, and to make a free use of the symbolism which they were both employing in art. The second part is therefore quite essential to Goethe's aim. Unfor-

## Goethe

tunately, he not only made too free a use of symbolism, but, as in *Meister*, complicated the story with interpolations and interludes until its philosophy of life was lost in the clouds.

Goethe seems never to have noticed that in later life he held two contradictory theories of art: symbolism and classicism. In proportion as the former tendency gained on him, he sinned against the simplicity and severity of the classical standard. Greek architecture was the literary model of his finest work; the complicated structure of the "Travel-years," and especially of the second part of *Faust*, is nearer to Gothic or Arabian. There is an impressive vastness in the scheme of the poem, there is even symmetry in the scheme, and the student of symbols can detect in it a profound and encyclopædic view of man's moral and cultural development, but few are able or disposed to follow the fortunes of Faust through such a labyrinth. It must be added that in the last few years his creative power was failing. He could work little each day, and could produce little, as a rule, during the few hours of work. This decay of strength is reflected in the poem. I do not, however, ascribe to that the curious termination of the poem, which seems to favour Romanticism, if not Catholicism. There is no serious intention whatever in the conclusion; Goethe did not believe in angels, devils, heaven, or the immortality of the body. But he had made the drama start in heaven, and must make it end there.

Leaving out of account, therefore, the elaborate interludes or annexes of the second part of *Faust*

## The Last Decade

and all the interpretations that are put on them, I will be content to show how the simple story agrees with the moral of *Wilhelm Meister*. The first part is apparently inconclusive, yet might stand alone, because it implies an important conclusion. The young man—it is interesting to note that Goethe originally conceived the scholar as a fairly young man: the rejuvenescence is a later modification—sets out on the highway with an adolescent scorn of “renunciation” and moral law. A few acts suffice to bring his earthly paradise down in ruins about him and poison or destroy the lives of all with whom he has had relations. It is enough to restore moral law to its right position, as a human enactment, but Faust does not draw the conclusion. He remains embittered against life, and a sequel must tell his development. The second part shows him recovering health and tranquillity among the mountains. As he sees the rays of the rising sun touch first the summits of the hills, he is reminded that truth may light upon the superior mind when it is hidden from those who live in the valleys of pleasure. Then Faust is introduced into the world of deeds, of power over men, of politics and statecraft. Here again he fails to find happiness; he dismisses it as Goethe dismissed the Court of Frederick the Great. We know Goethe’s opinion of politics and statesmanship. The next trial is in the world of art and beauty, but Helena, the symbol of art or beauty, vanishes from his embrace leaving only her garments. Art adorns life, but the substance is not in art. Great scientific achievements, illustrated by

## Goethe

the artificial manufacture of a man, are also reviewed, and still Faust passes on dissatisfied. At last blind, aged and weary, ruler of a small province, he decides to make his people happy. A sudden zeal for altruistic work seizes him; to make his land "paradisaic" and its people happy is "wisdom's last choice." He has discovered the secret of happiness, and, forgetful of his compact with the devil, cries to the passing moment: "Ah, prithee stay, thou art so fair." That is the serious end of *Faust*. The melodramatic supernaturalism that follows is insincere, and even the famous last lines of the poem ("The eternal woman-soul leads us upward") are neither a deduction from the tragedy nor an important part of Goethe's philosophy. Work, and work for others, is the solution of the riddle of life. Whether woman draws downward or upward depends upon the woman—and the man.

With the completion of *Faust* in July 1831 Goethe felt that his life-task was concluded. His health was still excellent and his frame straight and full. That his mind was still clear and vigorous is evident from the long and penetrating account which he had written in March of the great controversy between Cuvier and St. Hilaire in the French Academy. His natural philosophy of living things had now a masterly exponent in one who could gain the ear of the scientific world. In August he went to Ilmenau for a few days with his grandsons, in order to avoid a celebration of his eighty-second birthday. There was a wooden two-storeyed hut among the pines on the hill-top, in which the

## The Last Decade

Duke and he had passed many a day and night in the early years at Weimar. He had on one occasion scribbled some lines on the wall, and they had been later protected by glass. They belonged to the days when his fiery young nature had been impressed by the call of the hills. He read them again, and slowly repeated the last lines :

“Wait but a little,  
Thou too shalt rest.”

“Yes, wait but a little,” he was heard to say gently. On his return to Weimar he began quietly to prepare for his rest. In view of his excellent health there was no near prospect of death, if accident were averted, but accident dogs the steps of the old. He returned batches of letters to correspondents—Marianne von Willemer received hers in February—and saw that his papers were in the neat order which he was accustomed to keep.

On March 15th, in very bad weather, he caught cold. Accustomed to close rooms, he often caught cold, and took no serious notice of the chill. He was feverish and kept to bed on the following day, but seemed to recover. On the night of the 19th, however, he found himself suddenly and violently attacked. His limbs were icy cold, his chest was racked with pain, and his face was drawn and grey with his sufferings. The physician found him in a very grave condition, and took such measures as would relieve the pain without promising recovery. On the following day he thought that he had returned to life, as the pain had ceased. He sat all



## Goethe

day in the long easy-chair in the bedroom, vainly attempting to read and falling occasionally into a comatose condition.

On the morning of the 22nd he was again removed to the chair at six o'clock, and was still persuaded that he was getting better. He walked to the study, where Ottilie had spent the night despite his orders, and scolded her. The few intimate friends spent the day with him, knowing that they were listening to the master's voice for the last time. Goethe did not know it. About nine in the evening he asked the date, and, rising again from his chair, said to Ottilie: "So spring has set in: I shall get better the more quickly." He sat down and fell asleep, moving and muttering in his dreams. "See the beautiful woman's head in colour, with black locks, on a dark ground," they heard him mutter. His theory of colour seemed to mingle in his mind with the paling figures of the women he had known.

In the morning he asked for a cold fowl for breakfast, and even ordered his dinner. He again tried to walk to the study, but failed, and returned to the chair, and the hours went by in drowsy condition, with half-conscious intervals. Seeing a slip of paper on the ground, he rebuked them for "leaving Schiller's letters about." Shortly afterwards he said to his servant: "Open the second shutter also, so that we may have more light." It is from this sentence that the cry "More light" has been taken by those who would make it symbolical. His physician says that these were his

## The Last Decade

last words, though others say that he asked afterwards for Ottilie's hand. He sank slowly and painlessly, in half-conscious state, trying to spell letters with his finger after the power of speech had gone. About midday he seemed to settle more comfortably in the corner of the chair, and when they presently looked at him, they found that he was dead. For some days he lay in white satin shroud, crowned, for all to take their last look at the strong pale face, and on the 26th of March he was laid beside his brother poet in the ducal vault.

# INDEX

- Albrecht, Dr., 21, 29  
 Alchemy, Goethe studies, 56, 57  
*Alexis and Dora*, 289  
*Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*, 299  
 Altar raised by Goethe, 22  
 Amalia. Duchess, 150, 151, 183, 210, 229, 309  
 Ancestors of Goethe, 13  
 André, Johann, 134, 139  
 Arcadian Society, the, 37  
 Arnim, Achim von, 320  
 Apolda, 181  
 Assisi, Goethe at, 197  
 Auerbach tavern, the, 43, 48  
 Augereau, Marshal, 305  
  
 Bagration, Princess, 309  
 Bahrdt, 120  
 Basedow, 121, 124  
 Bavaria, Louis of, 357  
 Beauty, Goethe's love of, 19  
 Beethoven, 321  
 Behrisch, 48  
 Berlin, Goethe at, 178  
 Bertuch, 154, 156, 163  
 Bible, Goethe's attitude to the, 30  
 Bielschowsky, 17, 72, 86, 126, 239, 312  
 Bohme, Professor, 41, 48  
*Boie's Almanach*, 94  
 Boisserée, Sulpiz, 318, 327, 329  
 Bologna, 197  
 Borkenhaus, the, 176  
 Botany, Goethe's work in, 264-266  
 Böttiger, 298  
 Breikopf, 49  
 Brentano, Bettina, 313, 314, 320  
 —, Franz, 326, 330  
 —, Maximiliane, 106, 111-113  
 —, P. A., 112  
 Brion, Friederike, 68-87, 184  
 — family, the, 71  
 Buff, Charlotte, 95-99, 101, 116  
 Buffon, 268  
 Bury, 201, 230  
 Büttner, Professor, 258  
 Byron and Goethe, 354, 366  
  
*Cæsar*, 126  
*Campaign in France*, 241, 249  
 Carlyle, 235, 354  
 Castel Gandolfo, 209  
*Claudine von Villa Bella*, 142  
*Clavigo*, 119  
 Colour, Goethe's theory of, 257-261  
 Conservatism of Goethe, 343, 363  
*Contributions to Optics*, 259  
 Conversion of Goethe, 167  
 Coronation of Archduke Joseph, 32  
 Crespel, Franziska, 38  
 Cuvier, 267, 370  
  
 Daru, 317  
 Da Vinci, Leonardo, 212  
 Delf, Dorothea, 134, 135, 145  
 Democracy, Goethe and, 235, 236, 343, 363  
*Der Bürgergeneral*, 251  
*Der Gross-Köphth*, 251  
 De Rosne, 28  
*Descent of Christ into Hell*, 38  
*Die Aufgeregten*, 252  
*Die Geschwister*, 171  
*Die Laune des Verliebten*, 47  
*Die Mitschuldigen*, 47  
 Divorce, 311, 312  
 Doctorate of Goethe, 84  
 Dodd's *Beauties of Shakespeare*, 40, 51  
 Dresden, Goethe at, 51, 52, 231  
 Drusenheim, 74  
 Duentzer, 118  
  
 Eckermann, 350, 359  
 Egloffstein, Henriette von, 297  
*Egmont*, 142, 146, 226  
 Einsiedl, Chamberlain von, 154  
 Emilia, 61  
 Empress of Austria, 319, 320  
 Engelbach, 68  
 England, Goethe and, 354  
*Entwurf einer Farbenlehre*, 261  
*Erwin und Elmire*, 142  
 Ettersburg, 176  
*Euphrosyne*, 293

# Index

- Evolution, Goethe and, 267  
 Eye, evolution of the, 261  
 Fabricius, Katharina, 71  
 Fahlmer, Johanna, 111, 124  
*Farbenlehre*, 318  
*Faust*, 76, 126, 142, 175, 364-370  
 Flachsland, Caroline, 92, 106  
 Fleischer, 39, 41  
 Florence, 212  
 Frankfurt, 25, 26  
*Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen*, 90  
 Frauenplan, house in the, 188, 228, 248  
 Frederick the Great, 26, 178, 190  
 French in Frankfurt, the, 27-29  
 Fritsch, Minister von, 154, 162  
 Frommann, 309  
 Fürstenhaus, the, 152  
 Gallitzin, Princess, 248  
 Garbenheim, 95  
 Garden-house, the, 163  
 Geiger, L., 233  
 Gellert, Professor, 41  
 Geology, Goethe and, 262  
 Gerbermühle, 329, 330  
 "German House," the, 97  
 Germany, rising of, 322  
 Gerock, Antoinette, 101, 105, 118  
 —, Charlotte, 101  
 Göchhausen, Luise von, 153, 157  
 Goertz, 152, 154  
 Goethe, August, 249, 319, 322, 338, 347, 350, 359  
 Goethe, Cornelia, 16, 19, 24, 39, 40, 55, 90, 111, 137, 174  
 Goethe, Councillor J. K., 11, 13, 14, 21, 24, 29, 33, 38, 54, 58, 88, 93, 127, 131, 144, 183  
 Goethe, Frau, 12, 15-18, 23, 29, 33, 55, 88, 109, 112, 119, 183, 187, 233, 239, 291  
 Goethe-palm, the, 196  
*Götter, Helden, und Wieland*, 126  
 Gottsched, 48  
*Götz of Berlichingen*, 90, 102, 108-111  
 Greek, Goethe's knowledge of, 29  
 Gretchen, Goethe's first love, 31-53  
 Habits, Goethe's, 302, 303  
 Hadrian, 81, 363  
 Hafiz, 333, 335  
 Hamann, 75, 90  
 Hamilton, Sir W., 205  
 Hartz Mountains, visit to the, 165, 174  
 Hebrew, Goethe's knowledge of, 29  
 Heidelberg, 145  
 Heinemann, 16, 17, 133, 222, 291, 312  
 Heinse, 143  
 Herder, 65, 75, 90, 110, 134, 161, 165, 185, 190, 222, 282, 299  
 Heredity and genius, 12, 338  
 Herford, Professor, 225  
*Hermann and Dorothea*, 287, 288  
 Herzlieb, Wilhelmine, 309, 310  
 Hirt, 200  
 Hopfner, Professor, 98  
*Horen*, the, 281, 283  
 Horn, 37, 44, 47  
 House, Goethe's, 302  
 Hufeland, Dr., 180  
 Humboldt, 281, 282  
 Hypsistarii, the, 352  
 Ice Age, Goethe discovers the, 263  
 Ilmenau, 164, 370  
 Insects, studies of, 274  
 Intermaxillary bone, discovery of the, 191, 270  
*Iphigenia in Tauris*, 179, 180, 190  
 Jacobi, Fritz, 124, 142, 247  
 Jagemann, Caroline, 333, 340  
 Jena, battle of, 304  
 Jena, whip-contest at, 157  
*Jenaische Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*, 299  
 Jenkins, 209  
 Jentzel, General, 305  
 Jerusalem, 113  
 Joseph, Archduke, 32  
 Jung (Stilling), H., 60, 124, 285  
 Kalb, Chamberlain von, 144, 146, 154, 162  
 Kanne, Dr., 46  
 Kant, I., 275, 280  
 Karl, August, 125, 141, 144, 151, 155, 157, 160, 162, 182, 190, 214, 230, 282, 340, 357  
 Karlsbad, 191, 192  
 Karsten, 340  
 Kauffmann, Angelica, 200, 208  
 Kayser, 211  
 Kestner, 95-99, 101, 116  
 Klettenberg, Fraulein von, 55, 127  
 Klopstock, 24, 89, 125, 158  
 Knebel, Captain von, 125, 154, 156, 185

# Index

- Kniep, 205  
 Konstantin, Duke, 152  
 Korner, Judge, 231, 280, 322  
 Kotzbue, 298  
 Kraft, 179  
*Kunst und Alterthum*, 342  
  
 Langer, 52  
 Laroche, Fiau, 99, 112  
 Lassberg, Christel von, 177  
 Lavater, 120, 121, 138, 284  
 Leipsic, 39, 42  
 Lengsfeld, Charlotte, 278, 279  
 Lenz, 85, 86, 161  
 Lerne, 59, 84  
 Lessing, 51, 90  
*Letters of Goethe to a Child*, 314  
 Leuchsenring, 92, 100  
 Lewes, 14, 86, 95, 96, 104, 180, 221, 222, 314  
 Lewetzow, Ulrike von, 344-348  
 Light, nature of, 260, 261  
*Lili's Park*, 140  
 Lindau, Meyer von, 59, 174  
 Lisbon, earthquake at, 22  
 Loder, Professor, 269, 270  
 Lucinda, 61  
 Lucius, P. D., 72  
 Ludwig, Councillor, 40  
 Luise, Duchess, 141, 144, 152, 155, 158, 303, 306, 358  
 Luthwitz, Henriette von, 231  
  
 Mainz, siege of, 249  
 Malsesine, adventure at, 195  
 Mannheim, 88  
 Manzoni, 354  
 Marie Antoinette, 64  
 Marienbad, 345  
 Marriage, Goethe and, 220, 286, 307  
 Marriage of Goethe, 307, 308  
 Meixner, Charitas, 29, 37, 38  
 Merck, J. H., 91, 98, 99, 109, 111, 112, 114, 137, 216  
 Metamorphosis of plants, 264-266, 269  
 Meteorology, 263  
 Meyer, 200, 208, 230, 289, 342  
 Michael Angelo, 199  
 Milan Cathedral, 212  
 Mines, Commission of, 164  
*Mohammed*, 126  
 Morality, Goethe and, 168, 221, 351  
 Moritz, 37  
 Moritz, K. P., 200  
 Morphology, 271, 272  
  
 Muller, Chancellor, 359  
 Munch, Susanne M., 105, 118  
*Musen Almanach*, the, 285  
  
 Naples, Goethe at, 202-5, 208  
 Napoleon and Goethe, 306, 316-318  
 Neumann, Christiane, 293  
 Newton, Goethe's opposition to, 257-259  
 Ney, Marshal, 305  
  
 Oberrossla, 294  
*Ode an Schwager Chronos*, 126  
 Oeser, Friederike, 50  
 Offenbach, 134, 139  
 Oken, Professor, 271  
 Ossian, 66  
 Otto, Emperor, 106  
 Owen, Robert, 362, 364  
  
 Palermo, 206  
 Palladio, 195  
*Pandora*, 313  
 Pantheism, 275  
 Passavant, 32  
 Patriotism of Goethe, 322  
 Pavlovna, Maria, 358  
 Pestalozzi, 143  
 Philip, 163  
 Philosophy, Goethe and, 275  
 Plessing, 174  
*Poetry and Truth*, 41, 69, 318  
 Pogwisch, Ottilie von, 338, 339, 347, 350  
 Political ideal of Goethe, 235, 236, 363  
*Prometheus*, 126  
*Propylæen*, the, 293  
 Puppet-show, the, 20  
  
*Rameau's Niece*, 297  
 Raphael, 65, 199  
 Reeks, Margaret, 17, 130  
 Reiffenstein, Councillor von, 200  
 Reinhard, 309, 319  
 Religion of Goethe, 22, 168, 352  
 Riemer, 310  
 Riggi, Maddalena, 211  
*Roman Elegies*, 220, 225  
 Romanticism, 328, 342  
 Rome, Goethe at, 198-202, 209-12  
*Romeo and Juliet*, 295  
 Rousseau, gospel of, 108  
 Roussillon, Fraulein, 93, 106  
 Roveredo, 193

# Index

- Rudimentary organs, 275  
 Runkel, Lisette, 38
- St. Hilaire, G., 267, 272, 370  
 Salzmann, J. D., 59, 65, 80, 85  
*Satyros*, 111  
 Schardt, Herr von, 169  
 Schelling, 275, 282  
 Schiller, 216, 232, 276-300  
 —, Lotte, 278, 279, 297, 304, 308, 357  
 Schlosser, 43, 90, 98, 102, 111  
 Schneider, Councillor, 23, 34  
 Schönemann, Lili, 129-145, 148, 288  
 Schönkopf, Anna Katharina, 44-47, 53  
 Schopenhauer, Johanna, 308, 337  
 Schroeter, Corona, 158, 166, 180, 186  
 Schulthes, Barbara, 139, 213  
 Science and Poetry, 256  
 Scott, Sir W., 354  
 Seckendorff, Chamberlain von, 154  
 Sesenheim, 68, 71, 77, 184  
 Seven Years' War, the, 26  
 Shakespeare, Goethe and, 40, 66, 67, 109, 226, 296  
 Shuckmann, Judge von, 231  
 Sicily, Goethe in, 206, 207  
 Spinoza, 124, 275  
 Staël, Mme. de, 300  
 Stein, Frau von, 159, 169-173, 178, 185, 186, 189, 201, 216-218, 303, 308, 357  
 —, Herr von, 170, 189  
 —, Minister von, 330  
*Stella*, 142  
 Stock family, the, 49, 231  
 Stolberg, Augusta, 132, 133, 139, 140  
 —, Count, 136, 137, 157, 284  
 Strassburg, 51  
 Studies of Goethe, 21, 29  
*Sturm und Drang* movement, the, 90, 109  
 Suicide, Goethe and, 104  
 Swift, 66, 91
- Talleyrand, 317  
*Tasso*, 206, 227  
 Teleology, 273  
 Teplitz, 319, 322  
 Textor family, the, 13  
*The Awakening of Epimenides*, 324  
*The Bride of Corinth*, 289  
*The Elective Affinities*, 311, 334
- The God and the Bajadere*, 289  
*The Italian Journey*, 194  
*The Natural Daughter*, 252  
*The New Melusine*, 75  
*The New Pausanias*, 289  
*The Wandering Jew*, 126  
 Theatre, Goethe and the, 156, 294-296  
 Thirty Years' War, the, 26  
 Thoranc, Count, 27  
 Tiefert, 176  
 Tischbein, 200, 202  
*Trilogy of Passion*, 347  
 Trippel, 208  
*Triumph of Sensibility*, 177  
 Troost, 60  
 Turckheim, Herr von, 147, 288
- Urfaust*, the, 143  
 Utopia, the, of Goethe, 362, 363
- Valmy, 244  
*Venetian Epigrams*, 230  
 Venice, Goethe at, 126, 229  
 Verdun, 241, 242  
 Verona, 195  
 Vertebral theory of the skull, 270  
*Vicar of Wakefield*, 73  
 Voss, 281, 282  
 Vulpius, Christiane, 212-224, 229, 233, 247, 249, 290, 291, 304, 307, 319, 337
- Wallenstein*, 285  
*Wanderer's Storm Song*, 89  
 Wedel, Forester von, 154  
 Weimar, 149, 150  
 Werner, 310  
*Werther*, 92, 96, 102, 106, 108, 113-117, 177  
 Werthern auf Neunheiligen, J. L. von, 153, 186  
 Werthern-Beichlingen, Emilie von, 153  
*West-Eastern Divan*, 332-335  
 Wetzlar, 93  
 Weyland, 68, 71, 75  
 Wieland, 126, 151, 154, 318, 326  
*Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre*, 285, 286  
*Wilhelm Meister's Theatralische Sendung*, 17  
*Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre*, 360-364  
 Willemer, Marianne von, 329, 330-335, 358

# Index

- Winckelmann, 90  
Wolff, C. F., 265  
Works, Goethe and the, 176,  
363  
Wreden, Councillor von, 145  
*Xenien*, the, 283, 284  
Yiddish, Goethe's knowledge of, 30  
Zelter, 326, 334  
Ziegesar, Silvie von, 316  
Ziegler, Luise von, 93  
Zimmermann, 143, 169  
Zola, 117  
Zucchi, 200

**RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,**  
**BRUNSWICK STREET, STAMFORD STREET, S E.**  
**AND BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.**